Weird Tales

The Unique Magazine

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The DIMENSION TERROR

by EDMOND HAMILTON

"Graham plunged about in mad conflict with one of the beetle-men."

ONE man. . . .

From the very first, the story is his story. We see that, now. The inspiration, the work, the catastrophe—we can follow the thing, step by step, up to its flaming climax, and from the beginning it is centered around that single figure. In his hands lay the fate of worlds, the destiny of universes.

One man. . . .

It is with that man that one begins, with Dr. Harlan Graham, of the scientific faculty of the great America University, in New York City. For two years Graham had held the chair in astro-physics at that institution. It was a much-coveted position, in academic circles; so much so, in fact, that there had been a number of unofficial protests when it was awarded to so young a man as Graham, he being a year under thirty at the time.

The most critical, though, had been silenced for a time by the succession of brilliant achievements with which Graham had followed his assumption of the position. Such accomplishments as his famous "light-drift" experiments, and his final proof of the Selsner-Braun theory, had made his name honored among physicists, and had even extended his fame into the wider world. It seemed, indeed, that Graham was only at the start of an exceptionally brilliant career.

Even by that time, though, there

had been more than one protest against the sensationalism which marred his record. The worth of his concrete achievements none could question, but there were not a few who deprecated the occasional statements which he gave out, statements in which he was not afraid to put forth some extremely radical, not to say revolutionary, theories. These were, in fact, the imaginative fancies of a scientific mind, and should have been regarded as such, but unfortunately for Graham they were heralded to the world by the more sensational newspapers as newly discovered truths. There followed, invariably, a storm of corrections and denials from Graham, and it was felt that the name of the university was cheapened by the whole process.

Yet for all the rising tide of disapproval among Graham's colleagues, none had ever ventured to speak to him about it, for they knew something of his hot temper. In this unsatisfactory condition matters had remained for several months, until at last Graham put forth his famous "dimensional" theory, and set off an open explosion of angry controversy.

It was in a short article in a scientific journal that Graham first advanced his theory. Reading that article now, we find it hard to see in it the cause of such a monumental row as followed. It is true that Graham's idea was radical, startling even; but in itself it hardly seems sufficient cause for the uproar which it created. One can not escape the suspicion that the article was seized upon by Graham's enemies as a pretext for a general condemnation of him. That suspicion is strengthened by the fact that while the hypothesis advanced by Graham was radical enough, yet it was far from impossible, or even improbable.

In that article, indeed, he began by pointing out an obvious fact: that man's age-old conception of the cosmos as a three-dimensional universe is no longer acceptable. The work of De Sitter, and Einstein, and a multitude of others, has made it clear to us that our universe has at least four dimensions: length, breadth, thickness, and time. Within the last two decades this has come to be accepted by physicists as scientific fact.

But Graham had now boldly advanced another step. "To a savage," he wrote, "there seem to be but three dimensions only. Your savage can not conceive of the existence of a fourth, but we, with our advanced knowledge and science, know that matter has, indeed, a fourth dimension, which is time. Is it not possible, then, that there may exist still another dimension of which we know nothing, a fifth dimension which some day, with the aid of greater science, we may discover? And if this fifth dimension actually exists, then there may exist also, beside us but unseen by us, another world, a world that occupies the same length and breadth and thickness and time as our world, but lying next to us along the fifth dimension, and separated from us by it.

"Impossible? Not so. Take a stone —a solid, three-dimensional stone— and place it on a pedestal. Then remove it and place a book on the pedestal. There you have seen two three-dimensional objects occupying the same space. You will say, 'But not at the same time!' Then it is time that has separated those two objects—time, the fourth dimension. As far as the three dimensions of length and breadth and thickness are concerned, they have occupied the same space, but have occupied different places on the fourth dimension, time; have lain next to each other along that fourth dimension.

"And in the same way, granted the existence of a fifth dimension, two worlds might occupy the same

space, four-dimensionally, but lie at different places along the fifth dimension; lie next to each other along that dimension—two worlds, both occupying the same space at the same time, but each separated from the other by the unknown fifth dimension, if that dimension exists.

"If that dimension exists! But it does exist. Of that much, at least, I have experimental proof. It is not my purpose to relate here the technicalities of the experiment on which I have been working, but it is possible for me to give a hint as to its nature. We all know that the earth's magnetic currents, those vast tides of magnetic force that race between the poles, are subject to strange distortions and perturbations which have never been satisfactorily explained. Now, if we go on the assumption that another world lies next to us on the fifth dimension, it seems reasonable to suppose that the two worlds—our own and that unknown one—would affect each other's fields of magnetic force, across the gap that separates them on the fifth dimension. In this way the perturbations mentioned would be accounted for.

"Now it stands to reason that when two worlds, two universes, thus lie side by side on this fifth dimension, there will be some one spot where they will touch, or almost touch, just as two spheres lying side by side will touch at a single point. And it would be at this point, this contact with the other world, that the perturbation of earth's magnetic currents would be greatest. In other words, if one definitely located the spot where the perturbations centered, one would know that spot to be the contact between the two contiguous worlds.

"And that is what I have done. I have located that spot, that center of magnetic disturbance, and I am convinced that there is the contact with that other world, that world that lies next to us on the fifth dimension. I am not going to say where that spot is, for I desire to work there in the future, undisturbed. But I repeat that there is such a spot, such a contact, and that if that contact could be opened, if we could pass through it, we would be able to leap the gulf that separates us, along the fifth dimension, and enter an unknown world."

THUS far Graham's article. There can be no profit now in reviewing the bitter controversy that followed. It is probable that had Graham merely advanced the idea as an interesting hypothesis, there would have been few objections. But when he stated that he had in his possession experimental proof of the existence of such a fifth dimension, his critics opened the flood-gates of their wrath upon him.

It was demanded, not unreasonably, that he produce or at least explain the experiment to which he referred, or that he give the location of the spot which he called the "contact." But Graham refused to do this, stating, in strong language, that he would continue to work on the thing in his own way, and would give out no further information on it until his work had met with complete success.

His attitude was thus very much open to criticism, and his enemies took full advantage of the opportunity. They ridiculed Graham's theory to the utmost of their powers, and in the general condemnation there were those who did not hesitate to belittle his former achievements. The discussion, in fact, grew so extraordinarily bitter that it penetrated into the newspapers, which amused their readers with satirical accounts of Graham's fifth dimension and its possibilities.

Even among his own colleagues at the university there was some sharp criticism of Graham and his theory. That criticism, no doubt, was en-

hanced by the fact that there had always been more or less friction between Graham and his fellow-professors. Except for his own laboratory assistant, young Stephen Harron, he was almost without defenders at the university. And Harron, though entirely devoted to his superior, had had no part whatever in the disputed experiments, and so could offer no effective objections to Graham's critics.

One can not help feeling some sympathy for Graham under this ordeal. Undoubtedly he regretted, by that time, the impulse which had caused him to publish his theory to the world; but, holding back the rage he must have felt, he refused to enter into any discussion of the subject. Once or twice, though, his temper burst from his control and his anger blazed out against his detractors. And after each such outburst the condemnation and derision of him seemed redoubled.

It was not to be expected that the university heads would long endure such a situation. Before they could take any action on it, however, the entire matter was brought to a sudden climax by that stormy faculty meeting which marked the end of Graham's academic career.

Just what happened at that meeting is not, even now, well known. Most of the facts were suppressed, at the time, doubtless because it was felt that such a brawl among its professors detracted from the university's dignity. But some news of what had happened leaked out and found its way into the newspapers—enough, at least, to enable us to understand Graham's subsequent actions.

It would seem that the immediate cause of the uproar at the meeting was a short speech made by one of Graham's fellow-professors, in which the speaker took occasion to make some biting remarks concerning charlatans in general and "yellow-journal scientists" in particular. He had long been chafing beneath the fire of criticism, and these words were enough to touch off Graham's fury. He made for the platform and attempted violence upon the speaker. An undignified brawl ensued which made a bedlam of the room for several minutes. By that time some of the calmer heads had managed to quiet Graham, and a few moments later he left the building. His resignation from the university's faculty was announced in the next morning's newspapers.

And there the matter ended. The reporters who called at Graham's lodgings for interviews, the next morning, found that he had hastily packed and departed on the night before, his destination unknown. It was ascertained, also, that he had visited the university during the night and had evidently removed all of his notes and personal effects from the laboratory there. But from that point onward his movements could not be traced. Even his assistant, young Harron, who had been perhaps as close a friend as the fiery-tempered scientist possessed, knew nothing of his departure or his destination. And Harron, who was probably the one person to feel any real anxiety regarding the missing man, could find no more clue to his whereabouts than the reporters.

For a few days, Graham's disappearance was something of a minor mystery. It was believed by many that he had gone into hiding, for a time, to escape the storm of condemnation which had been raised by his own conduct. Not a few, however, asserted that the scientist's once-brilliant mind had become unhinged, accounting for his impossible theories and his strange disappearance. And this assertion was given credit, by a large section of the public, at least.

With the passing days, interest faded. A few weeks later Graham's

chair at the university was again filled, this time by a gray-bearded scientist who was belligerently conservative, and this action seemed to put a period to the entire matter. Other and greater sensations had crowded it from the public mind, by that time. Other and greater mysteries had taken its place in the limelight.

So Graham passed, and was forgotten. It seems a strange thing, now, that he could have been so forgotten. It seems a strange thing, to us, that the man could have been so forgotten who was to hold in his hands the destiny of planets, who was to change the course of universes, and who was to loose upon our world confusion, and horror, and death . . . and death . . . and death. . . .

2

It was on the first day of September, just three months after Graham's disappearance, that there descended upon the world—the terror. One sees, now, the impossibility of presenting any complete account of that gigantic catastrophe. The thing struck earth, struck all of earth, in a single moment, and in that moment there crashed down the civilization of the last five thousand years. In that moment men died by millions. It was panic; it was horror; it was doom. We who passed under that terror and survived it, we who have seen our own fairer cities rise up to replace those that vanished on that day of dread, need no description of the thing. And to those who did not experience it, no description would be adequate.

Yet even so, it is necessary to present here some impression, however feeble, of the catastrophe. With this purpose in mind, we turn to the account of young Harron, who not only witnessed the catastrophe at the one point where it struck most terribly, but was destined also to be the one witness of the final, tremendous climax, when the fate of a universe trembled in the balance. It is from the narrative of this laboratory assistant, indeed, that we have learned all that we shall ever know concerning that far-flung machination of dark purposes in which the cataclysm itself was but an incident.

Harron has given over the first section of his narrative to a recountal of the events leading up to Graham's disappearance—events which have already been summarized in this record. From Harron himself we learn nothing new concerning the case. As he points out, the whole "dimensional" business was outside of the university laboratory's regular routine, and as such, he had had no part in it. He admits, also, that the matter was never discussed between Graham and himself, in spite of their friendship, and attributes this silence on Graham's part to the latter's unwillingness to drag his assistant into the controversy.

But if Harron was thus without first-hand knowledge of Graham's disputed experiment and theory, he was none the less his superior's warm defender in the row that followed the publication of that theory. And after Graham's mysterious disappearance, Harron was apparently one of the few who retained any faith in the missing man.

He seems to have made some effort, indeed, through private detective agencies and the like, to discover Graham's whereabouts, and only desisted after all such efforts had proved futile. It seemed that nothing could be done, then, except to wait for some word from Graham himself. And as the days passed into weeks, and then into months, and that word did not come, Harron became convinced that his former superior had met with some misadventure, since nothing else explained, to him, this protracted silence on Graham's part.

So, through the long summer days, Harron went about his work at the university with that conviction and that fear growing in his mind. It was a summer of almost unprecedented heat at New York, he says, a summer of sultry days and brilliant nights. June had passed, and July, and August was passing, and so the long days, one by one, were drawing down toward September, and the first day of September.

The first day of September. . . .

HARRON has given us a detailed account of his own movements on that fateful September first. He had worked through all the morning, he says, in the university laboratories, but was free for the rest of the day and had spent the afternoon in a long, solitary tramp over Staten Island. The afternoon was fast waning when he boarded a ferry for the return to the city, and by the time he landed at the Battery it was sunset—a sunset that hung over Manhattan's up-flung towers like a settling golden haze. Walking across the little park north of the Battery, Harron was so caught by the sunset's beauty that he paused for a moment to view it, seating himself on a convenient bench.

At that time, he tells us, there were exceptionally few people in the little park. Only one or two idlers sprawled on near-by benches, and a few chance pedestrians. In the waters west of the park, though, there was more activity, with a dozen small boats darting to and fro on indeterminate errands, and a large and rusty freighter that was being escorted toward its dock by hooting tugs. High overhead a single airplane dipped and circled.

Harron turned his attention, in a few moments, to the city north of him. Directly beyond the little park its first great buildings loomed, and beyond them there extended away into the distance mile upon mile of towers and terraced pyramids, a great, man-made range of steel and stone and glass. From where he sat he could gaze up along the canyoned length of Broadway, cutting slantwise across the city, arrowing through a huddled mass of towering buildings. Its highest pinnacles still aspired into the light of the setting sun, but the street itself lay in shadow. In a moment the sun would dip behind the horizon, and down upon the city would steal the darkening dusk. With a sigh, Harron rose to go.

He paused a moment, glancing at his watch, then took a step forward. And in the next moment there came—the terror.

It was the sound that came first. Concerning that sound there has been considerable dispute. Some characterize it as a single clanging note, others as a humming of a few seconds' duration. Not a few assert that it was more like a short, shrill whistle than anything else. But to Harron it seemed exactly like a single tap of metal on metal, not loud, but with singular carrying power.

"It was very much like the sound of a hammer striking a nail," he writes. "A short, staccato metallic note, something like a loud click."

For a single moment he halted, listening. Then——

A terrific, thunderous roar broke from the air around him, a shattering, immense detonation like the shock of colliding worlds. At the same moment, while Harron gazed northward, a multitude of events registered themselves swiftly upon his vision. He had a single glimpse of the massed towers of the great city quivering violently, wavering and trembling like a scene in a shaken cinema-film; then, abruptly, they collapsed, disintegrated, crashed down to the ground in a titanic avalanche of brick and stone and glass. For an instant their thunder was

like the thunder of doom; then it lessened, and ceased. Where the mighty city had towered a moment before there lay now only mountainous heaps of broken brick and stone, a vast waste of wreckage that stretched far to the north and from which great dust-clouds were rising.

Harron stared, transfixed, his brain reeling. Slowly, mechanically, he turned to his left. Where the shipping had thronged in the waters a few seconds before there were now only some floating bits of wreckage. Beyond, where Jersey City had stood, there lay now only another dust-shrouded desert of wreckage. The airplane which had been circling above had suddenly collapsed and was plunging toward the ground, a limp, frameless thing of flapping cloth. And over all there reigned a deathlike, soul-shaking silence.

For a time, by his own account, Harron seems to have been a little insane. "I seem to remember staggering toward the wreckage of the city," he writes, "screaming, and with my hands raised toward the sky. There are other things, too, that come back to me dimly, like the misty scenes of some half-remembered dream. One of these memories is of the few people who had been in the park, like myself, at the moment of the catastrophe. The aquarium and other buildings at the south end of the park had collapsed, like the city, into shapeless heaps of ruins, but there remained perhaps a half-dozen people, altogether, in the open park. They were shouting hoarsely and running aimlessly about, and I saw one man throw himself into the water, in sheer insane terror. The rest, I think, wandered into the wrecked city north of us, in search of their own families or friends, no doubt. I was glad enough, then, that I was without family myself! I know, at least, that when I finally came back to my senses there remained but one man in the park besides myself."

It was this other, as Harron tells us, who finally brought him back to a realization of his surroundings, by tugging persistently at his arm. He was a rotund, pink-faced person of middle age, whose eyes were wide with non-understanding terror and who was bleeding from a long cut on his forehead. Clutching Harron's wrist, he pointed into the street a few yards away, where there lay an odd collection of miscellaneous fragments.

"I was driving," he said, his voice thin and quavering, "driving there, and my car—I fell—just pieces——"

Harron glanced for a moment at the fragments in the street, then bent closer to examine them. And as he did so the explanation of all that had happened seared across his mind. For what lay in the street was the remains of an automobile—an automobile from which every bit of iron and steel had vanished. The tires, the upholstery, the steering-wheel's wooden rim, even the bits of copper and nickel here and there—all these were undamaged, but every trace of iron and steel had disappeared. It was apparent that the car had collapsed instantly into that heap of fragments when its frame, motor, axles and most of its body had vanished.

Harron straightened, felt swiftly in his pockets. He drew forth a miscellaneous collection of small articles and stared at them wonderingly. For every bit of iron and steel in his pockets had vanished likewise. The blades of his penknife, most of the works of his watch, the clasp of a little note-book—down to the tiniest bit, all iron and steel was gone. He turned to the bench on which he had been sitting a moment before. In its place there lay on the ground a little heap of wooden slats, the steel framework having vanished.

"Steel!"

Harron cried the word aloud. He turned to the dazed man beside him.

"It's the steel—the iron and steel!" he cried. "Don't you see? The iron and steel's all gone, out of your car, out of everything!"

The other looked at him with blank, uncomprehending gaze.

"My car," he quavered; "it just seemed to fall and break up—I was driving to the ferry, to get home." He raised his dazed eyes toward the dust-veiled ruins across the river. "Home. I must get home, now."

Harron saw then that the man's brain had been turned a little by the shock, and by the wound on his head. He grasped his shoulders and strove to shake him into realization of his situation.

"You can't get home now!" he told him. "The ferry's wrecked—everything's wrecked. The city—everything——"

The other's eyes turned toward the colossal heaps of wreckage north of them.

"Earthquake?" he asked, mildly.

"No!" shouted Harron. "It's the steel—all the iron and steel disappearing—that's why the buildings all fell, when their steel frames and supports disappeared. All the iron and steel gone, God knows how!"

"Steel," whispered the other, staring northward with blank, uncomprehending gaze. In a moment he turned back to Harron. "I've got to get home," he repeated, with dull insistence. He glanced toward the north again, then abruptly started off across the park in that direction, with uncertain steps.

Harron ran after him, clutched his arm. "You can't go that way!" he cried.

The other wrested free from his grasp, with sudden anger. "Let me go!" he shouted, pushing the younger man away and continuing on his way across the park.

Standing there motionless, Harron watched him go, watched him plod on until he had reached the mighty heaps of ruins at the park's edge. He stared at these for a few seconds, confusedly; then clambered up and over them, and in a moment was lost to sight behind them. Harron found himself alone in the little park—alone in the whole world, almost, it seemed to him at that moment.

Around him there held sway an utter silence, an utter lack of movement. Over the vast heaps of wreckage north of him, and the other mounds of ruin that stood out back against the yellow sunset west of him, over these there hung a tremendous, smothering silence. In that spot, where for decades all the currents of earth's life had swirled together into the roaring whirlpool of the metropolis, there was now but silence—silence and a little wind that whispered furtively of coming night. Already the sky above was graying, darkening. Vague shadows were creeping out from the ruins, across the little park.

Standing there in that place of death, Harron felt his soul bowing beneath the awful silence. He flung out his arms in a grotesque gesture of sudden panic.

"No!" he shouted hoarsely, glancing around him with wild eyes. Then, with abrupt determination, he ran toward the waste of wreckage north of him, clawed his way up its sides, over slopes of broken brick and stone that were starred with shivered glass, until he stood at the summit of the first great mound, panting, gazing ahead with strained eyes through the failing light of dusk. Beyond lay only a vast expanse of miniature hills and gullies, formed from the wreckage of the collapsed city. On that desert of devastation there moved no sign of life, and north and south and east and west no spark of light pierced the deepening night.

It was only then that there came home to Harron some realization of the magnitude of that cataclysm which had riven the world of man. The city beneath him had collapsed into shapeless ruins, he knew, when all iron and steel in it had vanished. Had it been so on all earth? Had all the cities on the globe crashed down to ruin in that same moment of doom? And why? What had caused the vanishing of iron and steel? Had the earth passed through some interstellar nebula or cloud of gas that dissolved all iron like sugar in water? Harron could think of no other explanation. He strove for the moment to dismiss the matter from his dazed thoughts, to concentrate on the idea of escaping from the island, of leaving that place of silence and death.

It was quite dark, by then; the darkness was intensified by the gathering clouds which belted the firmament overhead. For a moment, though, the moon emerged from behind those clouds, and its light, pouring down on the ruins ahead, gave to Harron a rough idea of the path he must follow northward. It would be impossible to cross the rivers on either side, he knew, without a boat or raft, but northward it might be managed. He glanced around once more, then struck out toward the north, across the hills of tangled ruins which covered almost all the island.

Always afterward that journey northward over the island remained in Harron's memory as a confused, vaguely remembered time in which he toiled for a period that seemed eternal over the mighty wreckage-heaps which were all that remained of the great city. His hands torn and bleeding, his body bruised from a score of falls, he struggled on through the unchanging darkness and silence, feeling his way blindly forward.

Twice he heard the sound of wailing voices from somewhere in the darkness ahead, and once a cry of mortal agony whispered through the night to his ears. Once, too, he saw, far to the south, a great reflection of red light against the sky, a red glare that quivered in the heavens as though reflected from a great fire. For minutes Harron watched it, then turned and struggled on.

For more than a mile he toiled north across that desert of devastation, groping forward in deepest night, his only illumination that of the moon when it peeped occasionally through crevices in the clouds. Most of the time, though, he could but plunge blindly forward through the darkness.

He had struggled thus over a steep little ridge, and was making a sliding, scrambling progress down its other slope, when he blundered without warning into something warm and moving. It was a man, a man who clutched Harron's arm and uttered a hoarse cry.

With sudden panicky surprize Harron struck out at the other, strove to wrest himself free. For a single moment they struggled thus, in the dense darkness, and then the moon drifted again from behind its screen of clouds and poured down a flood of white, revealing light upon the face of the man with whom Harron struggled.

It was Graham.

3

For a moment the two men stared wildly into each other's eyes, without speaking, and then a choking cry burst from Harron.

"Graham!" he cried. "Graham!"

Graham was grasping his arm with fierce intensity, but for the moment he did not speak. When he did so it was in a hushed voice.

"Harron!" he whispered. "You escaped, Harron! You escaped—this——" and he flung an arm out toward the waste of wreckage that encircled them.

Abruptly he sprawled to the ground and lay there, his body shaken by great sobs. Harron dropped beside him, his brain whirling, and in a moment Graham raised his tear-stained face.

"My fault, Harron!" he cried. "This terror that has shattered the world of men to fragments, that has slain millions upon millions—and that greater terror that waits to spring upon a riven world—all my fault, Harron, from the first!"

Harron grasped the other's shoulders with sudden fierceness.

"Graham!" he exclaimed. "What happened? What have you done? My God, man, it's the end of everything! The iron and steel vanishing, cities collapsing like this one—and God knows how far this disaster has extended!"

Graham's eyes became fixed, staring, and when he spoke his voice was deadened. "It is over all earth," he said dully. "The iron—the steel—gone over all earth, at the same moment. I know."

Harron shrank back, appalled. "Over all earth!" he repeated. "Over all earth—like this!"

Graham bent his head. "Yes. Cities and ships and trains and airplanes and bridges, all gone, now; all collapsed in that one moment, when the iron and steel in them vanished; all crashed to the ground in that one moment. Civilization itself crashing to the earth in that moment—and the fault all mine!"

Harron was silent, stunned. It was Graham who spoke first. "Yet there is a chance yet for man," he said slowly. "A chance, if he can escape that greater horror that waits to spring upon our world. And that chance lies in our hands, Harron.

"It was I who loosed this doom upon the world," he said, his voice low and vibrant, "but maybe yet, together, we can stay that doom. You know nothing of what has happened, Harron, not even what has caused this city here, what has caused all our civilization, to crash to fragments. But I know."

He was silent for a moment before speaking again.

"You remember the dimensional experiment and the uproar over it," he continued. "After that uproar, and after my temper had got the best of me at that faculty meeting, I determined to go on with the experiment and attain complete proof of my theory, and to return and ram that proof down the throats of my enemies. I was confident that I could do so. Already I had incontrovertible proof of the existence of the fifth dimension, and already I had located the contact between our world and that other world that lies next to us along the fifth dimension.

"I had located that contact, as I stated at the time, by charting the currents of magnetic disturbance on the earth's surface and finding the spot where that disturbance was most intense. Strangely enough, I found that spot to be hardly more than a score of miles from New York City itself, and that spot I knew to be the contact between earth and its unseen neighbor world. The spot itself was situated deep in a large marsh that lay at the edge of the east Long Island coast, in that strange region of swamps and sand-dunes which stretches north for some miles beyond the resorts on the lower coast.

"This marsh, called Devil's Marsh in the near-by villages, was fully deserving of its lurid title. It was a nearly impenetrable place, with great beds of man-high reeds and stagnant, swampy pools, and with here and there a knoll of solid ground. There were paths through the marsh, precarious paths that led from knoll to knoll, but few knew them well enough to venture inside, for there were legends of more than one person who had met death in the quicksands which abounded there. It seemed almost incredible that there

could be a place of such wildness within so short a distance of the world's greatest city, but the very solitude of the place suited my plans well.

"It was on one of the knolls of ground, lying far in toward the marsh's center, that I had definitely located the point of greatest magnetic disturbance, and there, I knew, lay the contact which I sought, and which I meant to open. I had shared my knowledge with no one, for I wished to work there undisturbed. So when I left the university I was able to take the equipment which I had prepared and go straight to the place, without leaving any trace of my movements, since I had told no one—not even you, Harron!—what my intentions were. I had bought a small motor-boat in which was loaded the equipment I needed; so after leaving the university I was able to set out at once for the marsh.

"It was my plan to enter the marsh from the ocean side, by means of my boat, and thus avoid any news of my activities there becoming known in the villages that lay on the marsh's shore side. So I went there, alone, in my boat, mooring the boat itself to one of the outer knolls and transporting my equipment to the contact knoll by means of a rude scow which I had prepared. A tent which I set up sufficed me for a dwelling, and it was not long before I had the equipment I had brought set up also, and ready for my attempt to open the contact. That equipment included a small gasoline motor-generator, or dynamo, and a number of step-up transformers which would supply me with the high-frequency currents I needed. At last all my preparations were complete, and at once I began work on the great problem.

"The next six weeks were weeks of uninterrupted work, and they were, too, weeks of unchanging failure. It is useless to review to you all the different methods I used in my effort to open the contact, or even to learn something as to its nature. All my methods proved quite futile, and after weeks of such failure it began to seem to me that perhaps even my own theory of the fifth dimension's existence was baseless, and that I was following a blind lead.

"At last, though, discouraged as I was, it occurred to me to try a different tack. I knew that magnetic force or waves could pass through the contact, for they did pass through, causing the disturbance of magnetic currents on our side which had led me to my discovery. Therefore, I reasoned, it should be possible to send sound-waves also through the contact, if their wave-length were changed to that of the magnetic vibrations. Following this theory, I constructed a crude sender and receiver for sound signals, one which stepped up their frequency in sending and stepped it down again in receiving. The apparatus itself was actuated by a clicking sound-bar, much like that of a telegraph-sounder, and it was my plan to catch these sounds and hurl them out after increasing their wave-length, then use a circle of recording microphones to ascertain whether or not this sound was markedly weaker in one spot than another. If it were, it meant that in that spot some of the force of the sound-waves was decreased by penetrating through the contact itself, into that other world.

"So I set the apparatus into operation, and for a few days was at it almost constantly. So far as I could judge, at the end of that time, the sounds received by the microphones at the north edge of the knoll were somewhat weaker, and if my theory were correct it was there that the contact must be located. Before going farther, though, it occurred to me to set the receiving apparatus also in operation. It might be that some occasional sounds could come through

the contact that were high enough in frequency to register on my receiver. So I switched on the receiving apparatus and then, the next moment, fell back, stunned. For coming through it—coming, I knew, through the contact itself—were signals, clear and definite clicking signals, signals that repeated, over and over, the ones which I had sent out during the past few days. Signals that could come only from conscious, intelligent beings on the other side!

"It was the last thing I had looked for, this presence of intelligent, living creatures in that other, neighbor world. It had never occurred to me, somehow, that that world might be inhabited, the same as our own, but now I saw that this must be the case. They had caught the test-signals which I had sent through the contact and had sent them back to me, had repeated them, to show me that they had heard. At once I threw aside my first interest in opening the contact, and applied myself wholly to this communication with the beings on the other side.

"The next few weeks were weeks of wonder, to me. I spent the greater part of both day and night at my apparatus, in constant communication with the enigmatic creatures beyond the contact. And gradually, in those weeks, my communication with them became more and more intelligent, understandable, as more and more I came to learn their language, their clicking signals. I could never have learned it, perhaps, by signals alone, but any sound could be sent through the contact if its wavelength were changed enough; and by sending through the sound of an object, such as the splash of water or the tap of metal, and then giving its name, I soon got the rudiments of a vocabulary and in a short time could converse with them with some proficiency. Of course I understood only the clicking signals that passed between us, and their written or spoken language would have been incomprehensible to me, but the signals were all that I needed to know.

"During that time, and after I had learned to read their signals, those on the other side were constantly questioning me, asking about this world, its resources, the strength of its peoples, the limits of their science. They told me little enough about themselves, though I gathered that they were not human in our sense of the word, and that their own science was a far-advanced one, as, indeed, it must have been to receive and understand my signals. But their own questions concerning our earth never ceased, questions the purpose of which I did not divine, then.

"During all that time, indeed, I had given hardly any thought whatever to what I was doing. The sheer intoxication of my success, the sheer glory of the stupendous thing I had accomplished—these filled my mind to the exclusion of all else. I saw myself returning with what I had learned, to fling my achievement into the faces of those who had criticized me. There remained but one thing to be done, first, and that was to open the contact itself. Were this to be done, were one or two of those people on the other side to come through, there could be no further doubts as to my success. If the contact could be opened!

"It was that problem which I put up to those on the other side, through our signals, and they assured me that the thing was quite possible. For long, they told me, they had been aware of the existence of the fifth dimension and of the contact between the two worlds, but alone they could not open the contact. It could be opened, they said, only by means of a special, powerful repulsion ray, of which they had the secret, and that ray must be directed onto the contact

from both sides, from both worlds, at exactly the same moment. If they were to apply it from their own side the only result would be that the powerful ray would drive through the contact and blast a great crater or pit from the earth's surface, on this side. But if I were to prepare a ray-projector, and apply the ray to the contact from this side at the same moment they did so from the other side, the two rays would meet at the contact and would oppose and equalize each other, and the effect of their equalization at the contact would be to open that contact so that any matter could pass through it, from one world to the other.

"At once I agreed to follow their instructions and operate a similar ray from my side; and so, following the instructions which I received from them, I built up a ray-projector that would direct the powerful repulsion ray against the contact. Parts of what I built were clear to me and parts of it I never understood, so complicated was the work, but the detailed instructions signaled to me from the other side kept me on the right track. In hardly more than a week the projector was finished. In appearance it was something like a small, thick mortar or trench-cannon, mounted on a square case which held the actuating chamber of the ray. Switches for its control were mounted on the side of this case, and the tube-projector itself I carefully sighted so that it seemed to be pointing into the open air at the north edge of the knoll; though in reality, as I knew, it was aimed at the unseen contact between the two worlds. At last all was finished, and I stood ready for the attempt.

"It was at dawn that I waited there for their signal, for then was the time agreed on. Dawn of the first day of September, less than twenty-four hours ago! The ray was to be turned on, on both sides, at the exact moment when there sounded the tenth of a series of ten great bell-notes; for, as I have explained, it was vitally important that the ray be turned on from both sides at the same moment. So at dawn I stood beside the projector, my hands on its switches, and with the sound-receiving apparatus beside me, waiting for the signal.

"At last the signal came—a great, clanging bell-note, which arose from the receiving apparatus beside me and rolled out across the misty marsh, echoing away. Another note clanged, and another, and another, until nine such had sounded, and my hand trembled on the switch. Then—the tenth note. I snapped over the switch.

"Instantly a broad ray of brilliant blue light shot from the stubby nose of the projector into the air beside the knoll; then seemed to halt, at its edge, and spread and broaden into an oval screen of misty blue luminescence, like a single great upright oval of misty blue light, which seemed to rest upon the ground at the very northern edge of the knoll and which was all of thirty feet in height, with half that width. Through that area of curdled light I glimpsed, dimly, distance upon unfathomable distance, receding back and back, and knew that I was gazing into another world, gazing through the contact across the fifth dimension gap, into earth's neighbor world. The contact had been opened!

"For a moment there was nothing but that oval of azure light, and then something dark appeared behind it, seemed to swim through it, emerge upon this side. It was a dark shape that passed swiftly through the contact and stepped upon the knoll, followed by another, and another, until perhaps a dozen had passed through. Then another

great bell-note clanged out, and as agreed, I snapped back the switch of the projector. Instantly the ray died, and the oval of light at the knoll's edge vanished. And there, confronting me, stood a half-score or more of the inhabitants of the other side.

"For a moment, dazzled as my eyes yet were by the oval's blue brilliance, I could only dimly make out their forms, and in that moment they seemed not unhuman, to me, with dark bodies carried erect, and of much the same size and shape as human bodies. But as my eyes cleared and took in the details of the appearance, I sickened with sudden, alien horror. They were beetle-men!

"I can describe them only by that term. They were great, manlike forms, a little over the average man in height, but their bodies were dark and hard and shiny, like the bodies of insects, and the heads, or faces, were completely blank except for two eyes that protruded on short, waving stalks. The two legs and the two arms, placed much as on the human body, were slender and white, and stiff-jointed like the limbs of an insect. In all my communication with these beings, through the contact, I had never dreamed their appearance to be such as it was. I had assumed, with unconscious anthropomorphism, that they must necessarily be manlike, or human, and now that they stood before me in all the strange horror of their actual being, I shrank back in utter terror.

"Only an instant we stood thus, staring at each other, and then one of the things took a step toward me, uttering some strange, twittering sounds, like chirping and squeaking noises. He held out toward me one of the stiff spider-arms, and that was the final touch on my terror. I shouted something incoherent and staggered back, toward the knoll's edge. Before ever I reached it, though, there was a rustling rush behind me, a chorus of excited twitterings, and then I was gripped from behind by a dozen of the slender limbs, fettered swiftly with tough thongs, and then let fall to the ground. I was their prisoner.

"For a time, though, after securing me, they took no further notice of me, concentrating all their attention on the ray-projector which I had built, under their instructions, and carrying on a twittering conversation as they examined it. Next I saw one of them enter my tent and emerge, in a moment, with most of the articles inside in his grasp. After examining these, also, they held a conversation of minutes and then laid my rifle, the only weapon on the knoll, upon the ground. Then all stepped back and one held forth a small metal disk and pointed it toward the rifle. There was a tiny click, and as I watched I saw the barrel and the trigger and hammer mechanism of the rifle suddenly vanish, leaving only its wooden stock on the ground. They crowded around that stock, examining it, and seemed to discuss it for a few seconds; then they returned to the projector and to my sound-sending and receiving apparatus. In a moment one of them began to operate the latter, speaking through the contact with those on the other side by means of the clicking signals. And as I lay there, listening to those signals which I knew and understood, I comprehended at last what doom I had loosed upon the world.

"These beetle-people, inhabitants of earth's neighbor world for ages, had long been aware of the existence of the fifth dimension and had been aware that another world—our world—lay next to them on that dimension. Crowded, cramped, in their own world, they longed to enter and conquer ours, but such a course was impossible, for them. The contact,

as they had told me, could only be opened from both sides at once, and so they had been forced to forego their cherished dream of sweeping through it to take possession of our world.

"At last, however, there had come through the contact my signals, which had been heard by their scientists stationed on their own side of the contact, since always they were studying it and examining it. Those signals they had at once answered, and so they had got into communication with me in the way I have described. Masking their real purpose, they had feigned sympathy for my desire to open the contact, and had furnished me with information which would enable me to do so. It was one chance in a million, for them, this chance of getting someone on our side to help them open the contact. They had learned from me the condition and resources of the earth and knew that once the contact was opened they could rush through and conquer it; so that they awaited only the opening of the contact. And I had opened it!

"I had opened the contact, had acted unconsciously as their tool, had loosed a horde of savage conquerors upon the world, to annihilate the races of man. And as I listened to their clicking signals, I understood, too, what forces they would use to crash down the power and civilization of man, without the slightest risk to themselves. Forming a truly colossal plan, they meant to destroy, in a single moment, every bit of iron and steel on the surface of the earth, and thus, in that one moment, to destroy all the civilization and organizations of mankind.

"THINK what a part iron, and iron as steel, plays in our civilization! Man's civilization was built upon steel, made possible by steel alone. All forms of communication, of transport, of defense and attack, of daily existence, depend upon this one element, iron, whether as wrought-iron or cast-iron or steel. Trains, ships, planes, rails, bridges, buildings, machinery, weapons, instruments—all are built of iron or steel, or on a basis of iron or steel. Annihilate all iron and steel in the world and you have annihilated the civilization and power of man.

"And that is what these beetlemen were coldly planning to do. And as I listened to their signals and understood the method which they planned to use, I knew that they could do it. Already, as you know, men have achieved success in the age-old dream of transmutation of elements, and have changed one element to another with ease, in the laboratory. Modern alchemy! Not only the familiar uranium to radium process, which is a natural one, but also they have changed ordinary, every-day elements such as nitrogen or sodium into wholly different elements. Nor, knowing what we do, is such an accomplishment to be wondered at.

"We know that every atom of every element consists of a certain number of positive and negative electrons, some of which form a nucleus around which the others revolve. We know, too, that the nature of any element depends upon the number of electrons it contains, and that if you change that number you change the nature of the element, change it into a totally different element, in fact. That has been done, in the laboratory. An aluminum atom has a large number of electrons, while a hydrogen atom has but two. But suppose you use some ray or force to knock out of the atom of aluminum all electrons but two. Then what you have left is an atom of hydrogen. That very process has been accomplished. You will remember the experiments of Professor Ernest Rutherford, of Cambridge University. He was able to knock

electrons loose from atoms almost at will, and was thus able to change a dozen different elements, such as aluminum, sodium and chlorine, into hydrogen, simply by knocking electrons loose from the atoms of those elements.

"The scientists of the beetle-people, too, had discovered this process, and had gone farther in it, even, than we, since they were able to change iron, also, to hydrogen, by using an electrical vibration or wave which knocked loose electrons from each iron atom. It was a small wave-generator of this type which they had used to make the iron and steel in my rifle vanish, changing it from iron to weightless, impalpable hydrogen. Steel, of course, being but iron and a little carbon, was changed in the same way as the pure iron, by the same wave. And it was with this disintegrating wave that they planned to wreck the civilization of man, by using a wave-generator powerful enough to encircle the whole surface of the earth with its vibrations, destroying, in a single moment, all iron and steel on the earth's surface by converting it into hydrogen, into tenuous gas. A mighty blow that would crash down in one moment all the pride and power and civilization of a world!

"They had brought with them, through the contact, the materials which they needed, and at once they set to work to build the wave-generator which was to depose man from his lordship of the world. They did not set it up on the same knoll as the contact, the knoll on which I lay fettered, but erected it, instead, on a neighboring knoll, which lay some fifty or sixty feet away and was much smaller. Lying there on the ground, the bitterness of death in my heart, I could hear them working, splashing back and forth through the marsh from one knoll to the other, conversing in the squeaking twittering that was their speech.

"They paid no attention to me, for the time, though one remained always near by to watch me, but were intent on the wave-generator which they were building. Through the hours I lay there, under the hot sunlight, wondering what my own fate was to be. They had spared my life, so far, but that I could only attribute to the fact that of all men on earth I knew most about the contact, which was the gateway from their world to ours. I had no hope for long-continued life, nor did I wish to live long if I were thus to be the cause of the world's death.

"With mid-afternoon their work on the other knoll slackened and ceased, and I saw that they had apparently finished their work on the great wave-generator. It was simple in appearance, being a disk like the one with which they had destroyed my rifle, but many times larger, since this disk was all of thirty feet across and a fifth of that in height. Connected to it by heavy cables were other, smaller mechanisms, and there were other connections that seemed to run down into the soil of the knoll. The thing, however, appeared to be quite ready, and I knew that soon they would be putting it into operation. I knew, too, from their communication through the contact by means of the signals, that on the other side of the contact, in that other world, the forces of the beetle-people were massing, and that after the world had been devastated by the wave-generator, those forces would be able to sweep through the contact upon our world, spreading over it in their air-vehicles and raining down destruction on the races of man. They had agreed to open the contact just before dawn of the next day, when the signal would be given from the other side.

"Now, if ever, I must escape, but there seemed no chance for escape.

Two of the beetle-men still remained beside me, one being engaged in a general examination of the ray-projector's mechanism. It occurred to me that the ray-projector itself would be destroyed by the annihilating wave they planned to send out, but even that hope died as I remembered that in building it I had used, under their orders, no scrap of iron or steel. The only chance was for me to escape and carry a warning of the thing which threatened earth; yet how to escape?

"At last, though, there came my chance. For a moment the two guards on my own knoll left it, splashing across the marsh to join the others in their twittering conversation around the great wave-generator. At once, with pounding heart, I rolled across the knoll toward my tent, and into it. There, after a moment of agonized fumbling, I found what I sought, a heavy, keen-edged hunting-knife. Gripping this in my hands, behind my back, I managed to sever the bonds that held my ankles, and in a moment had freed my hands also. I jumped to my feet, then, and crept cautiously from the tent.

"All the beetle-men were still gathering around the mechanism on the other knoll, and were apparently paying no attention to me for the moment. I crept stealthily across the knoll and slid quietly into the marsh on the other side, then started to make my way, as quietly as possible, in the direction of the spot where my motor-boat was moored. Before I had taken twenty steps, a squeaking cry went up from behind and I knew that my escape had been discovered. Abandoning all efforts at stealth, I splashed madly ahead.

"Just ahead of me lay a great patch of high, concealing reeds, and I threw all my strength into an effort to reach it. I neared it, reached its edge, and then from behind came a sighing, whistling sound, and something flicked through the air past my ear. It was a little cloud of dense brown gas, flying through the air with arrow speed, fired from some weapon by my pursuers, I knew. It must have been intensely poisonous gas, too, for the reeds where it touched ahead withered and shriveled instantly under its touch. For the moment, though, I was safe, since before they could fire the thing at me again I was inside the shelter of the reeds.

A single moment I halted, panting; then moved as quietly as possible on through the reeds, toward the knoll where my boat was moored. I heard the cracking and splashing of my pursuers' progress, behind, but in that swamp they could not trace me, and as I went on the sounds of their pursuit died away. Within the next twenty minutes I had come to the little patch of solid ground that was my goal, and throwing the cover off the boat I started its motor, then swung it out toward the open sea. Slumped across the wheel in an utter stupor of exhaustion, I held to a course that took me southward along the coast.

"The sun was sinking by that time, and I split the waters with the utmost speed of which the craft was capable as I swung on around the resorts at the point of the coast and headed up the bay toward New York City. I was racing against time, I knew, for the beetle-men would inevitably hasten to carry out their plan, turning on the wave-generator as soon as I escaped, lest I carry warning. Yet there was a chance in a million that I might reach the city in time to bring that warning, and might take back help to destroy the invaders and their mechanisms.

"Hope rose in me as I sped up the bay toward the city, narrowly missing collisions by reason of my crazy speed. Then, when my hope was at its highest, when I was only a hundred yards from the docks, from the

city, there came the terror. I heard a low, metallic click, and the next moment I saw the whole city ahead collapse to earth; saw every building and bridge and vehicle in sight crash to earth, disintegrate. The next instant I found myself struggling in the water, my boat in floating fragments around me.

"I knew, in that moment, that my chance in a million had failed, and that the invaders had turned on the wave-generator, and in one moment had devastated a world. For a moment I felt like letting myself sink to my death in the waters below me, but the will to live was too strong in me for that, and I found myself swimming toward the shore. I reached it, that shore of ruin and death, and for a time lay like one dead myself. When I finally rose to my feet it was deepest night, and on all the horizon there was no sign of light. Vaguely it occurred to me to search over the ruined city for others who might have escaped, and so I set off across the desert of wreckage. And in the darkness I blundered into you, Harron. And now you know all.

"There in the marsh lies the machine that has wrecked our world, and there, too, are the invaders, the beetle-men, who have loosed this doom upon us. A few hours, now, and the contact will again open, and through it will pour the hordes of the beetle-people to annihilate mankind, already terrorized by this cataclysm. Out of that gateway into the unknown has come a terror that has shattered the civilization of man, and now, beyond that gateway, a greater terror waits to spring upon our wrecked and riven world!"

4

HARRON sat quite silent and unmoving, when Graham's voice had ceased. From somewhere out in the darkness there whispered again to his ears the sound of wailing voices, thin and unreal, but that was the only sound to be heard—that and the far howling of a dog.

It was Graham who broke the silence first. "There lies but one course open for us, Harron," he said, "but one chance yet, for the world. We must go back. Back to the marsh, to the contact. If we can get to that contact, can prevent its opening again, there will yet be a chance for man. That wave-generator—it destroyed all iron and steel in the world, at the will of the invaders, but if we could annihilate them we could use it to build up iron and steel at will, out of any element, to build up a new and fairer world. But the contact—that must not open again. There is so little time——"

The two stood up, and it was only then that Harron found his voice. "It's the only chance," he said, his voice sounding strangely in his own ears. "If we can get there—in time——"

Graham glanced up at the moon, a misty ball of light behind its screening clouds. "It's near midnight, now," he said, "and they plan to open the contact just before dawn. That will give us almost six hours. If we can make it in that——"

A moment longer they paused; then, silently, moved off over the ruins toward the east, Graham leading and Harron following close on his tracks.

Harron was never to forget the things he saw on that journey east across the face of a wrecked world, that journey through night and death toward the final hour of a planet's doom. Over the width of Manhattan Island they encountered only the mountainous ranges of wreckage, though there were voices, from north and south, coming faintly to their ears. Graham stayed for none of these, but pressed on through the darkness toward the docks east of the island, where they must cross to Brooklyn. There, after clambering

over mighty masses of shattered timber which were all that remained of docks and ships, they managed to cross the river on a crude raft made of planks tied together with lengths of rope. On this they were able to paddle over to the Brooklyn side.

That other side they found to be only a reproduction, on a smaller scale, of the desert of ruins which they had left. More had escaped there than in New York, though, and some had escaped who were not unscathed, for there came to their ears through the darkness piercing cries of pain, and vain appeals for help. Harron would have stopped for these, but Graham pressed on, with set face, through the night, toward the east. So at last they came out of the wreckage-plain that had been Brooklyn and made their way through the ruins of the suburban villages eastward. A thin moonlight illuminated the scene, by then, and there were other lights bobbing about in the wreckage on all sides of them, for it was apparent that many had escaped in these less thickly settled portions. Still the two forged on, east, east, east.

Four hours had passed, and the moon had sunk beneath the western horizon, when they came at last to an expanse of sandy beach, beyond which thundered the rolling waves of the Atlantic. Then, at last, Graham halted for a moment, grasping Harron's arm and pointing toward the north.

"Look!" he whispered.

Harron strained to pierce the darkness ahead with his vision, and at last made out, far ahead, a point of white light, a flaring speck of light that lay far out to their right. He turned questioning eyes to Graham.

"The knoll!" whispered Graham. "That light can only come from it, Harron. The marsh lies just ahead of us."

Stumbling and slipping, they started through the dry sand of the beach, and soon there came to Harron's nostrils the peculiar rotten smell of decaying vegetation and stagnant waters. A few rods more and there loomed ahead of them, white and ghostly, a forest of slender reeds, extending far ahead and far out on each side.

"The marsh," whispered Graham. A moment he halted, glancing toward the flaring point of light and taking his bearings from it; then plunged into the reeds, followed by Harron. Then began what was, to Harron, the hardest phase of their journey. The reeds were thick, and they dared not break their way through them, for they cracked with the sound of pistol-shots, there in the silence of the night; so they had to slide between them in slow, tortuous progress. At every step their feet sank into the water and mud for inches, and each step was an effort. They had lost sight of the point of light, on entering the reeds, but Graham pressed unhesitatingly forward. And after almost an hour of such progress there glimmered to their eyes, from far ahead, a feeble white light, a faint and far illumination that they were able to see only by reason of the darkness of the night.

At once Graham halted, crouching down, and pulling Harron down beside him. He spoke rapidly, in whispers.

"We must separate, Harron," he said. "One of us has as good a chance as the other, now, and by separating our chances are doubled. I'll circle around and approach the knoll from the other side, while you make your way straight to it from here. If one of us can get to that ray-projector and smash it, or damage it, it means a respite for the world, and before they can repair it we can get help and crush them. But it is the last chance, for earth, now."

The two men rose to their feet, and Graham took a few steps away, then paused and turned back to Harron, his face strange and drawn in the pale light from ahead, and lit by a haggard smile.

"Good-bye, Harron," he said. "I could wish that you had never been drawn into this, but—good luck!"

With that, and a final wave of his hand, Graham moved away, and in a moment he was swallowed up by the darkness. Harron found himself alone, and with racing pulses he, too, crept forward, toward the distant glimmer of light. That light intensified as he went on, and there came to his ears strange, small sounds, high and squeaking—twittering sounds, like none he had ever heard. Pushing forward through the mud and rotted reed-stalks and evil-smelling water, he came at last to the end of the reeds, and before him lay a clear circle of open marsh.

In this circle were two knolls, or patches of solid ground, rising above the shallow green water. The larger of these knolls lay on the other side of the clearing from where he crouched, while the smaller, on which was nothing but a single great disk-like object, was not a dozen feet from him. The flaring white light which illuminated the clearing proceeded from a single round bulb, or torch, which was suspended from the top of a tall rod planted in the larger knoll.

On this larger knoll, too, stood the machine Graham had described, the ray-projector, its stubby nose pointing toward the knoll's north edge. And around it, too, stood a dozen grotesque, nightmare forms. The beetle-men!

Harron's skin crept with deep horror as he gazed on them for the first time. The hard, shiny bodies, the blank faces, the protruding eyes and unhuman limbs—they gave, together, a sense of an inhabiting intelligence far removed from the intelligence of man, yet, in a way, akin to and superior to it. The beetle-men, he saw, were gathering around the ray-projector, for the moment, except for one who was busy with a smaller apparatus at the other side of the knoll, an apparatus which Harron guessed to be the sound-receiver which recorded the signals from the other side of the contact.

As he watched, the one at the sound-receiver uttered a squeaking call and the others left the projector for the moment and hastened toward him. Harron heard a clicking sound and knew them to be in communication with those on the contact's other side. For the moment, though, he did not heed them, for his eyes were on the projector, standing unprotected for the time being. It was the chance that Harron had hoped for, and at once he slipped from his place of concealment and crept forward across the open water, writhing snakelike onward toward the larger knoll, toward the mechanism on which depended the fate of a world.

He saw the beetle-men there suddenly turn and hurry back to the projector. In the next moment, one of them grasped a large switch on its side. One turned and stared fixedly toward the spot where Harron lay, then uttered a twittering cry. In a moment a half-dozen of them leapt from the knoll toward him. And at the same moment there rose abruptly from the sound-receiver behind them a mighty, clanging sound, a single great bell-note, that rolled out over the silent marsh like the stroke of doom.

One!

The first of the ten notes of the signal! The thought flashed through Harron's brain even as he strove to leap aside from the onrush of the beetle-men. They were too swift for him, though, and in an instant they were upon him.

Two!

The second great note clanged out as Harron went down beneath the rush of the invaders. He struck out with blind rage, felt the hard outer shell of their bodies break, crack, beneath his blows. But the others had gripped him from behind, pinioning him in their grasp.

Three!

With the last of his strength Harron struck out to free himself, but his blows were futile. He was hauled to his feet and dragged toward the smaller knoll, and onto it.

Four!

Harron had a glimpse of the beetle-man at the projector, standing ready at its switch. He and the one at the sound-receiver were all who remained on the larger knoll, now. The others were crowding about Harron, some holding him while others began to bind his arms and feet with thongs.

Five!

Abruptly Harron's body stiffened, and his eyes widened, as glancing beyond the beetle-men around him he saw something moving at the opposite edge of the clearing—something dark that was creeping slowly toward the larger knoll, unperceived as yet by any of the beetle-men. On it crawled—on——

Six!

Suddenly Harron bit his lips to keep from shouting aloud. That dark, creeping figure had raised itself a little, for a moment, and Harron had glimpsed its face. It was Graham!

Seven!

Abruptly, at that moment, a cry went up from the beetle-man at the sound-receiver, on the larger knoll, as he glimpsed Graham. He rushed from the knoll toward him, while the figures around Harron turned swiftly, startled from their task of binding him; then they, too, raced across the marsh toward Graham.

Eight!

Harron uttered a mad shout. He had seen Graham plunging about in mad conflict with the single beetle-man from the sound receiver, who had thrown himself upon him. And while the two whirled about in the shallow water the others raced toward the mêlée, with Harron struggling to release himself from his half-tied bonds.

Nine!

Graham suddenly straightened, and with a great whirling blow thrust the beetle-man with whom he struggled from him, then raced toward the knoll. He had reached it, now, was staggering toward the ray-projector, where the single guard there stood ready at the switch. The others were splashing madly toward the knoll, now—had reached its edge. The last of Harron's bonds gave way beneath his frantic fingers, and as he jumped to his feet he saw Graham throw himself upon the single figure at the projector-switch.

Ten!

The last mighty note clanged out, and in the instant that it did so the beetle-man at the switch threw that switch half over. But before he could completely open it Graham had reached him and with a single mighty blow had knocked him back from the machine. The next moment an oval of dazzling light appeared for a single instant at the edge of the knoll, and then it seemed to vomit azure lightnings upon the knoll, in one vast burst of brilliant blue fire, while a mighty explosion rocked the ground beneath Harron, throwing him from his feet.

He struggled up again, to see only thick clouds of white steam that hung where the knoll had been. They cleared, in a moment, and there, where the knoll had stood, where the ray-projector and Graham and the beetle-men had been, there was now but a single great gulf torn from the

soft ooze of the marsh—a single great crater blasted from the earth's surface there by the ray that had flashed through the contact from the other side—the ray that had blasted earth on this side, even as Graham had foretold, when it was not met by the opposing, equalizing ray from this side. The projector, and the man who had built it, and the beings who had thought to use it to loose hell upon the world—all these had been annihilated, together, in that one instant.

The contact was closed—forever.

It was more than an hour later that Harron staggered out of the marsh, at last, and into a wrecked little village that lay at its edge. He walked down its street with slow, uncertain steps, and paused, finally, to seat himself on some concrete steps, all that remained whole of a small building. He glanced around him, then, with weary eyes.

In the little expanse of wrecked buildings around him, lying silent beneath the paling light of dawn, there was no sign of life. Wherever the people of the village had fled, they were not in sight. Harron turned from it, toward the east, where, even as he watched, the gray sky was flushing to rose—a rose that deepened to crimson. Then rose the sun, flaming red, washing the world with rosy light as it swung higher and higher.

All over the world, Harron knew, that rising sun would be looking down on scenes like the one around him, on shattered villages and cities, on a devastated planet. All over the world, too, its first rays would be falling upon a dazed and terror-stricken humanity, wandering among the ruins of its world of yesterday.

But that would soon pass. It would pass. . . . That wave-generator lying back there in the marsh, that mechanism that had wrecked a world, it would help to rebuild a world, too; it would help to rear up that fairer world of which Graham had spoken. The disorganized, terrorized races of man would gather together again, build up again their ruined civilization.

And then, at least, they would understand the greater doom that had hung above them—the doom that they had escaped only by the narrowest of margins. Then, at least, they would come to know how the world had been saved, at the last moment, by one man.

One man. . . .

The MAN WHO REMEMBERED

by Willis Knapp Jones

"The earth shook, and the sky was getting darker—proof of the sun's anger."

AFTER the blow that knocked him senseless, Phil Espinosa regained consciousness babbling in some unknown tongue that neither of his American fellow scientists could understand.

None of them had seen the blow given, but from their Bolivian natives with the help of Paco, who spoke Spanish as well as Quechua, the Indian language, the ethnologist Craver discovered what had happened. It seemed that Gomu, an Indian worker whose light hair attracted as much notice as his surly disposition did, had got into an argument with Phil, who was superintending the excavation of a *huaco,* or Indian burial mound, and had hit the American over the head with a shovel. The other Indians had rushed to Phil and so had not seen what became of the rebellious Gomu.

And now, here was the scientific expedition hundreds of miles from a railroad with their archeologist out of his head, babbling nonsense and failing to recognize either Craver or Sanderson, the botanist and animal man, both of whom he had known for years.

Paco brought in a new problem: "The Indians want to know what to do."

The lad was at the tent into which the injured Espinosa had been brought. Before either of the Americans could answer, Espinosa sat up on the cot and again talked in that unknown tongue. The ethnologist knew that it was some formal language, since he could detect speech-

groups and voice inflections; but he was totally unacquainted with the vocabulary.

Paco, the youngster, opened his eyes, however, and after a moment of bewilderment, made some reply. At once Espinosa answered him, and an animated conversation ensued. It was evident several times that Espinosa used words that Paco did not understand, but for the most part they were perfectly intelligible to each other.

Yet when Sanderson interrupted and tried to speak to him in English, there was a dullness in their colleague's eyes. He said something to Paco which seemed to surprize the youngster.

"He say: 'Who are those men?' " he reported in Spanish.

"But, Phil," Craver burst out, "we're the men that came with you from the States to search for the lost city of the Incas. Don't you remember?"

Again the look of bewilderment in Phil's face. Sanderson repeated it in Spanish, but with just as little impression.

"What language does he understand?" both men demanded.

"He speak Quechua, *Señores,*" the boy told them. "But not the Quechua we talk. A long-time old language. Often he say words I not know until I remember how my grandmother who live 'most forever, she used to say."

They knew that Espinosa had studied Quechua, the ancient language of the Incas. They had heard him carrying on faltering conversations with natives when there had been no one near who could interpret for them; but never had he shown such fluency as now.

They began to be worried. He seemed to have forgotten everything. Through the boy they tried to stir his memory, reminding him of the great university that had sent them out, their great hopes of discovering traces of a legendary city, Intihuatamba. At the name, his eyes gleamed. Raising one of his small and very well-formed hands, he pointed and spoke rapidly.

"He say Intihuatamba five league yonder in the lap of the mountain that never sleep." Paco pointed to a lofty peak, a snowcap, though this was the South American November, springtime.

"Tell him he's all wrong," Craver commanded. "He himself found the map of the Conquistadores marking the location as right around here."

" 'Conquistadores,' he say. 'Who are Conquistadores?' "

"Good Lord, what's the matter with that man?" Sanderson cried. "The author of the best book published on remnants of the Conquistadores, and he asks us to tell him about the first Spaniards to visit South America!"

Craver was frankly skeptical. "Either he's playing a monstrous joke on us with pretense of ignorance, or else it's amnesia. Blows on the head do sometimes cause loss of memory. That's well authenticated."

Paco now interpreted something the archeologist said. "He want to know when you go to Intihuatamba."

"But yesterday when he set the men to digging, he told us himself that we were there."

When the lad repeated Sanderson's remark, Espinosa showed signs of disgust. The boy hesitated to translate his reply until Craver questioned him. "He say—he say, 'Surely he know where he live. He come from Intihuatamba his self.' "

"Humor him, Craver," Sanderson urged. "If he is raving and thinks it's somewhere else, we'd better go there. Leave the heavy stuff here and come back later when he's sane again."

"Yes, maybe a change of surroundings will restore him, though I'm sure I don't understand how the

little bump that I found on his head could knock him silly."

The Scotchman shook his head. "I don't know. I'm no doctor. But I did read somewhere about a man who was master of a dozen languages until his Convolution of Brocaw was injured, and then they all left him except his native tongue, the one he knew first of all."

"Well, that won't apply to Espinosa's case, then. I know that in spite of his Spanish name and his small hands and feet which Latins have, he was born in the United States and talked English long before he talked Spanish. And as for Quecha—well, he's been at that less than a year. He's cracked. That's the trouble with him. The idea of saying he lives in Intihuatamba! Why, that was nothing but a legend when the Spaniards reached Bolivia, and that was——"

"1526, four hundred years ago."

"Well, the Duchess believed as many as six impossible things before breakfast, but this is too near lunchtime for me to swallow any such tale as that."

PHIL ESPINOSA was giving evidence of impatience, so, to humor him, they began making preparations for their fifteen-mile tramp. Only part of the equipment was to be taken along, and half the men. Gray-haired Sanderson, the leader of scientific expeditions in virtually every part of the world, picked out the things to take along, and left the permanent camp in charge of a majordomo who was to keep the Indians at work opening the Inca burial mound.

After a light meal, the rest started out: the three white men, Paco the interpreter, and eight porters. Their road was the bed of a stream along which Espinosa led them unhesitatingly. At first he examined his shoes and clothing with some curiosity, but said nothing about them. He did, however, catch up a poncho to throw over his shoulders. Then with a machete in his hand to cut down bushes and jungle foliage, he fell into a swinging stride at their head.

Craver came next, a revolver at his belt with the holster unbuckled. He did not trust his colleague now. With insane notions in his head and a dangerous weapon in his hand, there was no knowing what he might do. But the archeologist paid no attention to the rest. He seemed to have reverted almost to a savage, a bundle of nerves and fears. His glance, suddenly grown keen, swept everything with quick, birdlike turns of his head. His pace was so rapid over the muddy road that the carriers had to pant under their loads, but he did not delay, except momentarily to find the best way around pools.

Once, as they slowed down while he slashed down jungle growth to let them skirt a mudhole, Sanderson called to Craver, "I've been thinking about the Convolution of Brocaw theory. I don't much hold with those who stick language ability into one corner of the skull, like a cupboard, but if there's any truth in heredity, and his line of Spanish ancestors got linked with some of the Indians who lived here before the Conquistadores arrived, then Quechua was their family language long before English, and——"

"Sanderson, you're cracked too! I guess it's time we left this unhealthful part of Bolivia and started home. Oh, Espinosa—I say, Phil, aren't you ready to go home, too?"

The archeologist, machete in hand, worked steadily, entirely oblivious to the mention of his name. Not even when Craver went directly behind him and called him again did he turn.

"I wonder what he's calling himself now," he said aloud. Then he lapsed into Spanish. "Paco, ask what *el patrón* calls himself."

Back came the answer: "*Cúnturni*, Son of the Condor."

Craver laughed. "That's not evolution, Sanderson, having a good scientist like Espinosa turn into a scavenger bird. That's devolution."

Just then their guide turned aside abruptly. He seemed surprized at the absence of a trail, but after a halt of a moment, and a glance upward at the snow-capped cone that towered just above them, he swung his machete and cut a swath through the lush jungle growth.

Scarcely a sound broke the stillness; only the crash of falling stalks, the sloshing of their feet and the chattering of the frightened birds. The air was dank, for no sunlight entered through the matted foliage stretching a dozen feet above them. There were no taller trees, such as the eighty-foot arching roof that they had met so often before, because now they were ascending the easy slope toward the mountain.

Sanderson stopped once and gathered a handful of the soil. "H'm, lava," he muttered. "Old Thunderbore must have had some great old eruptions in the past, but they didn't succeed in killing back the jungle."

Though the plant life was not so dense, their path was as dark as ever, for night was approaching. "Ask him how near we are," Craver directed.

"He say in one half coca chew you see the fire of his village."

"Yes, he seems to be pure native now. Don't you remember the Indian we met near Cuzco who told Phil that before he could use up one cud of that coca they chew we'd be at a *posada* where we could pass the night?"

The archeologist did indeed seem all native. There was a tenseness about his stride quite foreign to his usual way of walking. But finally he stopped and Paco relayed his command: "Remain here till I come back."

He gave a weird bird-call and went on swiftly. Sanderson would have remained, but Craver followed. "Come on," he said. "There's no telling what he'll do in the state he's in."

But not until Espinosa stopped did they catch up to him. There he was, standing on a mound, and repeating this mournful bird-call, listening and looking in every direction in an agony of uncertainty. He was talking petulantly to himself. Paco, appearing at last, interpreted his words. "He say he lost. Intihuatamba is here but town disappear."

"Never mind. Tell him it's too dark to find it tonight. We'll make camp now and search in the morning."

Espinosa made no reply. He seemed dazed as he sat in the light of the campfire which the porters had quickly built. There was something melancholy about him. He kept rubbing his delicately formed hands together, and from time to time he would imitate some jungle bird.

The other white men were greatly worried over him, but were helpless. Craver tried to examine his wound, which was revealed since the bandage had been tugged off by some projecting branch, but Phil snarled at him and wrenched away. He would not let even Sanderson touch him, though previously he had been very fond of the white-haired botanist.

He ate the food which was given him, giving the impression that his thoughts were far away. And then, wrapping himself in his poncho, he lay down with his feet to the fire as the Indians about him were doing.

Through Paco, Sanderson asked him to come into the shelter tent, but he replied that he always slept on the ground when away from his own stone hut, and would be cold away from a fire.

TWICE during the night Sanderson came out to see if Phil was all right. Once he put more wood on the fire because the American, sleeping between two porters, was turning and muttering, and Sanderson was afraid he would catch cold, since it was nearing morning.

The next thing he knew, he was aroused by a wail that petrified him. The scream that followed was enough to frighten anyone. It brought the two white men out of their tent, and every Indian was on his feet. Espinosa, the only one not aroused in fear, looked up at those who were gathering around him.

Daylight was breaking, and in the greenish light he wore an expression of embarrassment. "Jove, what a rummy dream!" he remarked, sitting up. "I say, Sandy, did I yell as loud as I dreamed I did."

"Louder!" replied the Scot.

Paco rattled off something in Quechua, but Espinosa put up a restraining hand and in slow and halting syllables started to answer. Then he switched into Spanish. "It's too early in the morning for me to struggle with Quechua, Paco," he apologized.

As he passed his hand over his head to smooth down his rumpled hair, a startled expression crossed his face. "Ouch!" he said. His exploring fingers touched the bump gently. Then the sight of the volcano above him made him scowl and look about him. "What's the joke?" he demanded. "What are we doing here?"

"That's what we wanted to discover," Craver told him. "It's your funeral. You guided us here."

"Go ahead; I'm green," Espinosa laughed. "I'll bite and ask for explanations. And what about this crack on my—oh, I remember. Gomu! But, I say! That's queer."

"What's queer?" asked Sanderson.

"The way he fitted into my dream. Say, won't some of you tell me what it's all about?"

"As if you didn't know!" Craver remarked dryly. "But anything to please you. Like a prophet with a message, you were all for leading us to Intihuatamba fifteen miles from where we were, so out you——"

"Now wait. How could I lead you there? We were there already."

"That's what we thought, but when you began rattling off Quechua so fast that——"

"That's enough, Craver. I'm fairly gullible, but when you talk of my ability to speak Quechua, I won't swallow that, even though I dreamed I could handle it like a whiz."

"Maybe you'd better tell us your dream," Sanderson spoke for the first time. "Perhaps that will straighten things out."

"All right. We must be some miles away from camp, so I'll tell it to you on the way back. I'm sorry I brought you here on a wild goose chase, if I did it. But I must have been out of my head. I'm still a little bit muddled. But let's get packed and start back."

The white-haired botanist shook his head. "I don't know whether I want to go back. I believe I'd like to sink at least one shaft here."

"There couldn't be anything here," Espinosa insisted. "We're wasting time that we ought to be devoting to Intihuatamba."

"Perhaps this is Intihuatamba. You know we Scotch are supposed to be sort of fey, and I'm not too American to have lost my confidence in what you call 'hunches.' That mound over there——"

"Don't be foolish, Sandy. No people in their right minds, especially a group of Inca courtiers fleeing with their families after their uprising went wrong, the way the founders of Intihuatamba were supposed to have done, would pick a site just below an active volcano. Why, that's as crazy as my dream was!"

"We humored you yesterday, Phil. Now it's my turn. Tell those porters to uncover that mound, and while they're doing it, let's hear your dream."

The Quechua that Espinosa used to them came far less confidently than it had come the day before, but he made them understand, and after the breakfast Phil told his dream.

"I THOUGHT I was one of the courtiers that built the place. You see, after being saturated with all my reading and study of the place, it's no wonder. But I even knew my name. It was"—he paused and scowled, then a smile broke—"Cúnturni."

He did not see the startled glance exchanged between his companions.

"We fled from Cuzco, till we got so far away that we thought the Inca would never find us. We built thatched houses of wood, and took up our lives under the cone of just such a volcano as that, only we thought, then, that it was extinct. Oh, I can remember dozens of little incidents! We had run off with the Rainbow Banner of the Inca, and since I was the strongest one in the group"—he looked at his almost feminine hands with a rueful smile—"I was made keeper of it. My house was bigger than the others and more strongly built, the only one in the village of stone.

"I was married, too. She had been called Star of the Inca, but when we left the Inca she became simply *Ccocolla*, Star. I can see her now." He shut his eyes.

For a moment there was silence, then Craver spoke up. "Go on, leave her out of it. She doesn't matter."

"Oh, but she does! We were so happy together. I remember making for her a curious ring with a gold nugget that looked like a star. She joked me about it because I thought I was making it small, but it slipped off from every finger but her thumb, while it just fitted my little finger. I must have had a bigger one than I have now. Funny how the details come back to me, isn't it?"

"You read them somewhere." Craver yawned. "But what I'd like to hear is an explanation of your yell, if you have one. Otherwise, I'm ready to start back."

"Well, if you don't let me tell my dream——"

"Go ahead, Phil," Sanderson told him. "I'm more interested than you know."

"The trouble came when a priest announced that the Sun was angry with us and would not help us until we sent back the banner. I thought he had been bribed, because just then a messenger arrived from Cuzco, a light-haired Indian named—all I can think of is Gomu."

Craver nodded. "No wonder. You've got him on the brain since he cracked you yesterday."

"Maybe," Espinosa agreed, though he did not sound convinced. "But to continue. Ccocolla and I had been married a year and were going to have a baby, a boy, for in those days we knew how to determine the sex of children, though for the life of me I can't remember how it was done. Anyhow, I swore that the Inca should never get this banner while I was alive. Some wanted to surrender and return, since they were tired of having to do all their own work and live so miserably, but Ccocolla and I withdrew to my house and to its strongest tower.

"That was about noon, and the sky was getting darker all the time. We heard queer rumbles, and the earth shook. Most of the people were afraid, especially when Gomu said—and the priest agreed—that it was proof of the Sun's anger. He called them all together to decide what to do, but I refused. Then Gomu came, asking to speak to me; and, seeing that he was alone, I unfastened the door. But he attacked me treacher-

ously and stunned me with some weapon that he had hidden.

"It was dark when I recovered. There was a sulfurous smell everywhere and I heard what I thought was rain pattering on the stone roof. I was in exquisite pain. One of my legs had been so bruised by something that I could not move. I called Ccocolla. No answer. The hearth fire was still burning, and by its light, at the foot of the couch where she was accustomed to lie, I saw something gleaming. I crawled over, each inch a torture. It was the ring I had made for her.

"Then I was in an agony of doubt. The Rainbow Banner which I had hung from the wall was gone. Had Gomu taken her, too? I slipped the ring onto my little finger and edged my way to the door. Someone must know where she was. By now I could scarcely breathe. The odor of sulfur was increasing, and when I opened the door, I knew the cause.

"There was the weirdest of lights everywhere, reflected from the red glow coming from the top of the mountain."

Espinosa shuddered. "It is all horribly vivid. Though I have never seen a volcano in eruption, I know just how one looks. What I thought was rain was a shower of ashes. Some of the houses were already aflame.

"Down the mountain, glowing red-hot, came a stream of molten lava. I saw that unless it turned it would overrun me. There was I, helpless, unable to bear my weight on my left leg. No one came in spite of my screams, not even my wife. I was sure then that she had been carried off, losing her ring in the struggle, or possibly leaving it as a sign for me."

He was trembling all over. He pressed the balls of his palms into his eyes as though to shut out the sight.

"And then what?" It was difficult to say whether cynicism or anxiety colored Craver's tones.

Then I screamed and woke up to see you all looking at me as though I were a ghost."

"Well, you tell a good story," Craver acknowledged, "but you'll have to admit it was nothing but a dream."

"Yes, I know, but it was weird enough while it lasted."

Sanderson was studying the mountain. "Have either of you noticed that scar down the southwest side?"

Both his companions raised their heads.

"You see where the lava spilled over in some eruption, and then started down the slope. For about half-way down it is headed straight for this spot, then it turns into that gully and is diverted southward. Doesn't that bear out what Phil was trying to describe?"

Craver, now that Espinosa was recovered, was endeavoring to treat the whole affair as a huge joke. "He's probably been studying the mountain since daybreak to make his story sound all right."

The archeologist shook his head. "No, I swear I told you absolutely nothing but what I dreamed. But why all the fuss over a little dream?"

"You never studied dreams seriously, apparently," Sanderson spoke seriously. "I don't mean dreambook stuff—coffins mean death, shoes mean marriage, and that rot. But psychologists claim to be able to tell not only the past life of the individual, but also of the race, by dream study. Mightn't it be that Phil went through some experience that one of his remote ancestors endured?"

"Impossible!" Craver objected. "In the first place, any ancestor of Espinosa's with a broken leg would have been killed by the volcano, and a dead man can't transmit hereditary influences."

"But according to his story, he left a child, and the father's fate might have been a legend, or he might have been saved. Besides, if there's anything to it, a volcanic eruption would be a good explanation of the disappearance of the town, just as Herculaneum was blotted out in Italy."

"Sanderson, are you going to give Phil the satisfaction of thinking he fooled us yesterday with his pretense of insanity?"

"I'll give you my word of honor," Espinosa broke in, "that I have no recollection of anything between the time that Indian attacked me and this morning when I yelled."

"The knock on the head would take care of that, Craver."

"Amnesia—if that's what he had—is cured only by the passing of years or by an operation," the ethnologist pointed out.

"Or by another blow. In his dream he was struck on the head, you remember."

Craver laughed heartily. "A blow given in a dream cure amnesia?"

Sanderson's face was serious. "Do you remember two lines by the English poet, Noyes:

> Did the grog we dreamed we swallowed
> Make us dream of all that followed?

I don't know. I'm only wondering."

THERE was a shout from Paco, and at his words the scientists leaped up. The Indians had stepped back, and in plain sight was a gap in the ground through which some stone beams projected, protected from the elements by a grayish, ashlike covering. Inside could be seen some sort of room.

"Well, Craver?" Sanderson was exultant. "How about it? The place Phil dreamed of, the tallest building in the town whose reinforcements held up against the weight of the volcanic ashes!"

Under the spell of their enthusiasm and curiosity, the Indians went on digging, while Sanderson, sure that they had found the ruins of the lost Inca city, sent Paco back for the other porters and the rest of the stores.

The scientists were too much excited to stop for anything, and they even helped dig while the Indians were resting for lunch.

By the middle of the afternoon, they realized that they had made one of the finds of archeology, a place left in the form in which it had existed centuries before. Enough of the hard soil had been removed from the building to free the front entrance. Then more carefully than ever they went on uncovering what they found. Finally a human shoulder-bone was uncovered that crumbled into dust at the touch. Sanderson at once ordered them to stop, and Phil, whose duty was to take charge of such excavation, continued the task.

One of the careless Indians had smashed part of the left arm, but around the forearm and hand the volcanic deposit had fossilized.

From the instant of their discovery, Phil had been like one in a dream. He did not seem to know what was going on. Craver, his skepticism vanished, was as eager as the others to get to the bottom of everything. Seeing the mold around the arm, he had an idea. He picked up what was like a shell for a cast and tried to put his hand in it. "It's more your size, Phil," he said. "Put your arm in. My hand is much too big."

Espinosa did as he was directed. After tapping the shell, he thrust in his arm. Then his eyes dilated. He gasped and fainted.

As quickly as possible they drew off the shell, fearing some animal had made it his shelter. But Craver gave a cry and pointed. On Espinosa's little finger was a ring they knew he had never worn before, a plain gold ring, but set in it was a little gold nugget, exactly like a tiny gold star.

THE INCUBATOR MAN

by WALLACE WEST

"I am Lilith Hughes," she said.

"The best and ultimate test of the ability of man to live long beyond his present allotted score of years would be to have a man, from his babyhood up, live in what practically would be a sterilized test-tube. He would breathe sterilized air. He would eat sterilized food. He would drink sterilized liquids. He would thus be placed as far as humanly possible beyond the range of the myriad microbes that in many ways are the enemies of man and that bring about many of his ailments. Such a man, growing and living under special conditions, might live to be 200." —Sir Ronald Ross.

SIR RONALD ROSS, great scientist though you were, and dead though you have been these hundred and twenty-five years, I lay a curse upon you for those words.

I, Columbus Norton, the Incubator Man, am that creature Sir Ronald foretold, and I have lived a life of blackest hell that humanity might view me dispassionately through the gigantic glass test-tube wherein I have existed for one hundred and fifty years, and learn how to increase the length of life of the worthless race thereby.

My father, Dr. Philip Norton, lived in what was then Newark, New Jersey, and enjoyed a nation-wide reputation as a specialist in germ diseases. He loved germs. He dreamed of germs. His whole life was filled with germ culture and the new and strange diseases he had discovered or had

learned to check. In fact, he had almost ceased to be human.

Then, in 1927 A. D., as time was reckoned in those days, he read an interview which Sir Ronald Ross, discoverer of the malaria microbe, had given to a newspaper reporter in what must have been an unguarded moment. This interview suggested to my father the idea of growing a man under glass, so to speak—I am the result!

The idea of growing a man in an absolutely healthful environment fastened upon the mind of my father like one of the diseases whose master he was. It made him give up all his other work so that he might devote his time to that one plan. It made him send me, his as yet unborn son, into the most pitiful slavery man has ever suffered.

I have read how it all was done. Dr. Norton constructed an air-tight glass chamber approximately three hundred feet square and twenty feet high. He equipped it with heating and cooling devices of the latest type, and fitted it with gymnastic apparatus, comfortable lodgings, a magnificent library and a swimming-pool.

The glass used was of the then new type which permitted the passage of ultra-violet rays. By the use of temperature-regulating devices an ideal outdoor climate of exactly even temperature was assured, winter and summer. He installed filtration plants for the air and water to be used, and an air-tight chamber by which food and other necessary articles could be passed into the enclosure without the slightest danger of any germ life entering with it.

When I was born, I was whisked immediately into this prison. While I was an infant a white-clad nurse cared for me. She wore rubber gloves and a respirator so that her touch could not contaminate me nor her breath mingle with mine.

I have often wondered what sort of woman my mother must have been to allow her son to be snatched from her so easily. According to the books I have read (which, by the way, have given me almost my only knowledge of the outside world), mother love is not expressed so. Perhaps she also had given her life to science, or did not realize what she had done. I never found out. She died before I learned to talk.

During my childhood the imprisonment wasn't so bad. I knew nothing else. As I became able to care for myself, the nurse withdrew. After that I had contact with the outer world only through loud-speaking telephones which my father had installed and through the books and cinema films slipped through the fumigation chamber into my cell.

The best teachers were procured for me; the best of books and apparatus provided. The most perfect care was taken of my health. Living under such ideal conditions, I progressed in my studies with amazing rapidity, soon outstripping my teachers. At the age of twelve I passed the Harvard University entrance examinations, and in my sixteenth year was granted a Ph. D. degree. Yes, Dr. Norton had cause to be proud of his experiment.

I remember him well—a man with a stern, handsome face, who sat outside my cage, day after day, taking endless notes and talking pleasantly with me, yet watching my every reaction as though I were a guinea-pig.

He induced me to study medicine, and I made rapid progress, until we ran into the difficulty that live animal tissues could not be introduced into the chamber for fear of bringing disease germs with them. So, to this day, my knowledge of medical science is purely academic.

Oh, don't think I never rebelled! I did, bitterly; but my sense of duty, which had been fostered by my father in his many talks with me, conquered my rebellion. Dr. Norton continually pointed out the great service I was

doing to humanity—that through me and through him the world was learning to control itself, and to live sanely and keep healthy and live long.

The only time I ever saw my father angry was when, in a fit of boyish rage, I threatened to smash the glass and escape. His face turned white as marble. He stood, trembling with passion, hands clenched above his head, like some prophet of old about to hurl imprecations upon sinners.

"Boy," he thundered, "you hold the future of humanity in that club which you have in your hands. Mankind must live longer to become wise enough to conquer his environment. Shatter that glass, and man's future collapses into the dust with it. Aye, and if there is a hell, your soul will be consigned to the deepest pit."

What could a mere child do against the force of such a personality? I crept away trembling and never after that dared oppose his wishes.

His prophecy soon proved itself correct. The human race entered a new cycle as the result of dietary truths which I exemplified. Dr. Norton proved that a purely vegetable diet was more healthful for the human animal; that certain combinations of foods were poisonous while others were beneficial; that toxic substances in the blood will kill a man as surely as strychnin; that under right conditions of living, human machinery is little subject to breakage or deterioration—in short, during the first thirty years of my life, preventive medicine was advanced to such an extent that the average expectancy of human life jumped from 55.3 to 68 years.

One thing my father had not counted upon was the fact that I would become a man, with a man's dreams of love and fair women. And by the time I reached maturity there was no help for the matter. He regretted again and again that he had not also placed a girl baby in the chamber.

It was too late for that by the time he realized the desirability of such an experiment. I believe I hastened the day of his death by refusing to allow him to place a newly born girl in the chamber, even then, so that she might grow to maturity under the same ideal conditions, and perhaps, years later, become my mate. He must have been a soulless monster, even to think of such a scheme—and yet—and yet I loved him and while he lived did not greatly mind my confinement.

I slept eight hours daily, studied eight hours and played eight hours. The best books, cinemas and apparatus were provided for my research work. By the time I was fifty I can unhesitatingly say that I knew more than any one man in the world.

I was well developed physically also, in spite of the restricted space in which I lived, for my father had always impressed upon me the fact that a healthy body makes a healthy mind. I know that I must have been, even then, a splendid specimen of manhood, for I could not help but hear, through my loud speakers, the comments of the people who by this time were flocking from the ends of the earth to see me.

It was a strange thing to see my father and the other members of his establishment growing old, while I remained at the peak of my vitality. It has become a common thing to me since then, but the knowledge that death was stalking those outside, while I escaped unscathed, was at the time inexpressibly sad.

My father died when I was near fifty years old. With my consent he willed his laboratories and my glass cubicle to the government, with the understanding that I was to be carefully guarded and tended. His last words to me were: "Carry on, boy. Some day, through you, this silly thing that I am about to do won't be necessary."

With his passing my last real contact with the outside world was bro-

ken. I never could grow attached to the vapid guards and caretakers who took his place, or the obsequious officials who periodically came to refresh their shallow minds with my learning and advice.

For this reason the thing I am about to do no longer seems wrong to me. I have spent my life in the service of humanity. Men live longer and are, perhaps, somewhat wiser, but I often wonder, now, whether the sacrifice was worth while. At least, in a few hours I shall know whether the world is worth saving. My only wonder is that I have waited thus long.

But to return to my story. As the years passed I confined myself more and more to my studies, and ignored the crowds that gathered outside the walls of my cage to look and admire. I can truthfully say that my scientific treatises, written here, have been the wonder of the world. It was I who first explained the true time and space equation, and showed that Einstein, handicaped as he was by lack of equipment and the faulty work of his predecessors, had only half glimpsed the truth in his theory that space is subject to curvature. But enough of such nonsense.

It was when I was seventy-three years old, in the year 2000 A. D., or the year One, Free Time, that the Ruskinite rebellion broke out in the United Americas. There must have been some atavistic streak in me, for I sympathized heartily with those poor, benighted Ruskinites who dreamed of a breakdown of the gigantic monster of Science that mankind, like a Frankenstein, is building up about him, and who tried to smash it and return to the simple agricultural life of their forefathers.

Of course the outbreak was doomed to failure from the start, though streets of the country ran blood for a few bitter weeks. The very science which they hated subdued them. How could disciples of Ruskin stoop to heat rays, poison gases and atomic bombs? They perished fighting to the last, but I know that for weeks government troops guarded my chamber as though it were a precious jewel. Sad would have been my lot, I am sure, could the Ruskinites have captured my cubicle. I know that I, who was at heart their best friend, was hated by them as the heart and soul of the scientific system.

I will skip over the next seventy-five years of my life with but a few words. Strange—three-quarters of a century—time enough for most men to live a full life and die content. For me they passed in a dreary succession, enlightened only by my studies and my dreams. As I look back, I conceive myself as a being almost in a state of hibernation, waiting for the vital spark which would awaken me.

In me metabolism and catabolism seemed exactly balanced. After my thirty-fifth year, I grew no older physically. I never was sick. I was amply confirming that prediction of Sir Ronald, made so long ago. My only regret was that my father could not have lived to appreciate his triumph—a triumph which had turned dust in my mouth ages ago, and which seemed no more remarkable than those silly experiments by which early Twentieth Century doctors were able to keep chicken hearts alive indefinitely in a sterile medium.

I devoted myself to study as before, until I conceived that I had in my one head the whole sum of human knowledge. I gave out that knowledge to the world until it drew so far ahead of present understanding that scientists could no longer comprehend it. Oh, the silly fools! With so much to do, man dawdles by the way like a lazy schoolboy. Well, soon now they must begin working out their own salvation.

And now I draw near the end of my story. As I said, I had conceived that on my one hundred and fiftieth birthday I held in my brain

the sum of human knowledge, together with much that was beyond the comprehension of any but myself. Savants from all the world consulted me regarding knotty problems of science and government. I might add, also, that the present expectancy of life is eighty years.

Yet how little we know, poor things that humans are! My complacency lies in ruins about me. A whole new set of complexes and speculations has been released within me. Three days ago, while resting on the lawn outside my quarters, I was struck by something totally outside my experience. As I lay there a shadow fell on the grass and I looked up at a girl who stood not ten feet away from me on the other side of the glass barrier.

"Good morning," I said inanely, knowing that the telephones would make me perfectly audible outside the enclosure.

She nodded slightly and continued to look at me with wide, luminous eyes, in which there was, I somehow felt, an infinite sadness.

She was a beautiful thing—beautiful with the glory which perfect health and well-being give to our modern girls. Her eyes were dark and soft, with that slightly oblong slant which is giving more and more of an Oriental appearance to the people of America.

Her body was a thing to dream of as it was revealed by the short kilt and embroidered band across the breasts, which is the fashion of today. Her feet, in little, gold-tipped sandals, were high-arched and sentient. Her hair was the color of gold taken from Inca mines—but I perceive I grow ridiculous.

"Did you wish to consult me?" I asked foolishly, growing uncomfortable under that steady gaze.

Again she shook her head, but added, in a voice that tinkled silver music: "Why should I wish to consult you?"

And strangely, I could think of no reply. What could I tell that radiant being that she did not already know?

"Your name?" I ventured.

"Why," she answered, as though surprized that it could be of the slightest interest to me, "I'm Lilith Hughes, 3684."

"Of the National Theater," I exclaimed, interpreting the last two figures. "Of course you would be."

She smiled faintly. "Thank you." A pause followed. "I must be going," she said at last. "Performance in San Francisco, you know."

And then I said a strange thing. The words seemed to form themselves without my volition. "Can't you stay and talk with me a little longer?" I pleaded. "It's lonely here."

Again she smiled that slow, enchanting smile of hers. "Can't. I'm sorry. The Torpedo doesn't wait, you know. And then you have your work to do." Her voice sank to the faintest murmur, which she did not realize I could hear plainly through the amplifiers. "You have your work to do—poor thing!"

When I looked up, she was gone.

The hell of one hundred and fifty years of loneliness has been nothing to the hell of the last three days!

Last night I made up my mind to leave all this. Humanity must take care of itself. To be perfectly frank: to hell with humanity; I want out of this.

I am a man, sound and strong and well-favored. I look and feel and think like one of thirty-five and I—am in love. Strange that such a primal urge, which I had considered merely a trick of nature's to prolong the race, should sweep me away at last!

I am going to seal this statement of my case in an envelope, so that if anything happens to me in this strange world I am about to explore, people will understand why I have done this. Tonight I'll smash this cursed glass and go in search of Lilith. Pretty name—Lilith.

THE foregoing manuscript, carefully typed and sealed, was found on the body of Columbus Norton, the Incubator Man, who died of an almost unknown disease—the measles—two days after he broke out of his sealed chamber.

Attendants at B. Hospital, where he was taken, say that because of his long stay in an absolutely germless atmosphere he had failed to develop any resistance to disease and was 100 per cent susceptible to the first microbe which found lodgment in his body. He died a very few hours after being brought to the hospital.

Evidently he had spent his time, until the disease struck him, in becoming acquainted with a world whose ways he knew only by hearsay. At least there is no evidence that he ever took the San Francisco Torpedo, as the manuscript implies was his purpose.

Ol' Black Sarah

By BERNARD AUSTIN DWYER

Ol' Black Sarah come up outen de groun'—
  Go 'way, Black Sarah! go 'way!
Don' yo' heah de yelp o' dat ol' black houn'?
  Ooh! go 'way! Black Sarah, go 'way!

Fotch in de chilluns—shet de do'—
  Go 'way, Black Sarah! go 'way!
Snack up de shutters—Ah heah her fo' sho'—
  Ooh! go 'way! Black Sarah, go 'way!

De screech-owl screech—de moon am dim—
  Go 'way, Black Sarah! go 'way!
De bat fly ovah de hick'ry limb—
  Ooh! go 'way! Black Sarah, go 'way!

Her teef am sharp—her lips blood-red—
  Go 'way, Black Sarah! go 'way!
Her eyes am white, turn back in her head!
  Ooh! go 'way! Black Sarah, go 'way!

Ol' Sarah was a voodoo—long ago!—
  Go 'way, Black Sarah! go 'way!
De pickaninny's bone an' de mistletoe—
  Ooh! go 'way! Black Sarah, go 'way!

When de ol' houn' bark—de moon jus' gleams—
  Go 'way! Black Sarah, go 'way!
Ol' Sarah's face fill de darkies' dreams—
  Ooh! go 'way! Black Sarah, go 'way!

The RAT

By S. Fowler Wright

"He looked at it again at midday, and called his wife to observe it."

DR. MERSON looked at the dying rat, and decided that, should he delay his experiment longer, it would be dead before morning.

He had nursed it now for nearly six months, and it had been very old and blind and feeble when he had bought it.

He had told Briggs that he would give him £5 for the oldest rat in Belsham, and the rat-catcher had earned his money.

It had surprized him, when he had first approached the subject, to realize how difficult it would be to find an animal that was really old and feeble. He had to observe that nature does not encourage the prolongation of pain and weariness: when health goes, life very quickly follows.

But he knew that, in the course of their age-long warfare with the human race, the rats had arrived at some social organization, and had adopted some of our practises, and in particular, that when a disease of blindness (to which they are very liable) attacks them, they may be nursed and fed by members of their family, so that life is prolonged to an age which would otherwise be impossible.

So he had asked for an aged rat, and had watched its vitality recede, till now it was too weak to crawl toward the tempting food that was offered. . . . It was so dull with age that it did not flinch when the needle pricked it.

2

THE next morning it was not dead. It lay sleeping; old, and blind, and decrepit. It was not pleasant to look at, but it may have been less feeble than the night before—and the food had been eaten.

Dr. Merson, observing this, became aware that his heart was beating fast, with a sudden excitement, of which

he had not supposed himself to be capable.

When he looked at it again at midday, and observed that it was feebly attending to a neglected toilet, he did a thing which was less wise than his usual custom, calling his wife to observe it.

Mrs. Merson disliked his experiments; and his own habit of professional reticence disinclined him from speech which had no immediate purpose. But this was a discovery of such momentous consequence that he was impelled to share it.

"You mean that no one need ever die?" she asked incredulously. She was not greatly impressed, even if she took it with any seriousness. She was a healthy young woman, utterly without imagination, and the cook had given notice an hour ago.

"Yes, it might mean that — or nearly—unless by accident. . . . You see," he continued, to an auditor who scarcely heard him, "it isn't really new. We've known for a long time that youth would continue if the cells of which the body is built could have the right stimuli, but it's been difficult to find what they are. Some of the lower forms of life never die, as it is. The old ones break apart, and each part acquires a new impulse of growth from the shock of that division. But in the higher animals there is a change in the substance or activities of the cells as the years pass, the nature of which has been difficult to ascertain, though its results have been evident. . . ."

He stopped, as he became aware that Mrs. Merson had ceased to listen. She regarded the sleeping rat with disfavor.

"I shouldn't think anything wants to live when it's that old," she said, with decision. She had the impatience of healthy youth for all signs of decrepitude. They seemed stupid.

She heard the voice of the butcher at the back door, and her mind reverted to matters of greater urgency. She went back to the kitchen.

3

The rat improved very slowly. Its appetite increased. It moved more briskly. It gained weight. It gave more attention to its toilet. It became wilder, and more alert to the sounds around it. Finally, its sight returned.

The process was not rapid, but continuous. At the end of three months from when it had received the injection (which had not been repeated), it showed the bodily activity and physique of a young rat.

Dr. Merson did not mention it again to his wife, nor did he seek another confidant. He became thoughtful, and, at times, appeared to be suffering from acute depression. His patients complained, and his practise suffered.

The fact is that he was beginning to fear the consequences of his discovery.

At first, it had seemed simple—and stupendous. He was about to benefit his race as no man had done before him. Had he not found a way by which death itself was defeated? He saw that it would change the whole face of the earth. Old age would become an obscene tradition. Disease would be powerless to overcome the new vitality which he had discovered. Men would no longer die as their minds approached the threshold of wisdom.

He thought of his own patients. There was Mrs. Corner, who would be dead of tuberculosis within a year, unless he should use his new power for her rescue—Minnie Corner, with three young children, fighting her hopeless battle, always "a little better today" when he called to watch the slow, relentless progress of a disease that he could not conquer. He would be very glad to give her health. Having it in his power, it was a clear and simple duty, as her doctor, to do it. But (so far as he could suppose) he

would do more than that. He would give her an approximation to immortality. Not absolute immortality. Her body would still be liable to be damaged or destroyed by violence. Certainly, it would have no power to survive the planet on which it lived. It would be liable to drowning, or suffocation. But it would no longer be in subjection to the treachery of time. Fed, and guarded from violence, it would not age nor decay. There was something odd in imagining Minnie Corner immortal. But there was nothing repellent. He supposed it would mean treating her children in the same way. They would be annoyed if they observed themselves growing old and feeble, while their mother remained young. It would confuse the relationship. Neither would she thank him for such a tableau. He knew Mrs. Corner well enough to realize that there would be no rest for him till he had conferred the same boon upon her household that he should give to her. Well, why not?

About two of the children there would be no difficulty. But he disliked Peter. He disliked Peter intensely. He could not endure the thought of an immortal Peter. It wasn't the clubfoot, though it did seem a pity that it should become an abiding feature of a world grown static: it was certain qualities of meanness and cruelty which the boy had shown from infancy, which his mother had lamented, but which she had been powerless to influence.

According to the law of nature which now prevailed, Peter would grow old, and in due course he would die, and his unpleasant characteristics would perish with him. He might have children, but these children would be different from himself, whether better or worse, and, in due course, they would have still different children, the race repeating itself with an unending variety.

Somehow, this seemed a better prospect than that of an enduring Peter.

Yet he could not imagine an arrangement being smoothly made by which Peter would be consigned to an exceptional mortality. However carefully his moral and physical inferiorities, and the importance of his early elimination, might be explained to him, Dr. Merson felt sure that he would resent it furiously. He imagined a violent assault upon his own person by an adult and desperate Peter to whom he was refusing the boon of immortality. Even a murderous assault. . . .

His mind was diverted to observe that murder would become a more serious crime than it now is—the risk of being murdered a more dreadful possibility. Indeed, all physical risks would be taken at an almost infinitely greater price, and — presumably — with a corresponding reluctance.

It was a relief to abandon these speculations to the task of lancing a boil on the neck of the landlord of the *Spotted Cow*.

4

The weeks went on, and the rat continued, and even increased its youthful vigor. Its eyes were bright. Its coat was smooth and glossy. Its movements were lithe and swift. It was fierce, and watchful for a chance of biting. Once its teeth met in the sleeve of Dr. Merson's coat, and the incident led him to wonder whether its new vitality could be communicated by the medium of a bite. He was aware that the thought gave him a sensation of a peril escaped, and he realized that he was already regarding his discovery with apprehension rather than pleasure. Certainly, he had no wish to have its benefits thrust upon him before he had deliberated more fully on their ultimate consequences.

Also, the rat was disconcertingly watchful for a chance of escaping

from its confinement. Once it actually got its head through the closing door, and it needed a sharp blow to induce it to abandon the hope of freedom. Dr. Merson had an actual nightmare as the result of imagining that it had escaped, and that his invention was destroyed or forgotten, so that the world would pass at last to the dominion of a continually increasing army of immortal rats.

5

After that incident, Dr. Merson became more careful to lock the door of the laboratory in which the rat was confined, and to keep the key in his pocket. Considering the possibilities which might follow should it be accidentally let loose, he realized how little he yet knew of the nature of his discovery. He could not even say whether the vitality it conferred would be passed on to succeeding generations. He imagined some prolific and noxious insect inoculated to immortality, and still exercising a blind fecundity. It might become uncontrollable, and destroy everything before it. That would be a weird ending to created life on this abortive planet, which must already be a joke to all surrounding intelligences.

Yet the idea was more than remotely possible. He imagined his discovery made public, and its advantages become the common property of mankind, and then some super-criminal threatening his race with the results of such an inoculation of some hostile vermin, unless they should do his pleasure eternally.

Day by day his mind renewed its efforts to probe the consequences of his discovery, and retired bewildered, as it encountered some new problem, or some obvious result which he had not previously contemplated.

He saw that the human race would become static. Not in brain, perhaps; but, at least, in body. That alone must make profound differences, produce profound cleavages. The ugly and deformed must remain so to all eternity, perhaps with an increased vitality: but vitality would not alter structure.

There might be an agitation to eliminate the obviously unfit in brain or body, and to replace them with healthier children. But who would decide? Would those who were judged inferior be content to be sacrificed? He imagined fierce and ruthless wars of extermination. Suppose, again, that the white races should attempt to confine his discovery to their own use. He imagined the black and yellow races attacking them with a mad ferocity, to force the priceless secret from them. Would the white race yield, or would they risk their potentially immortal bodies in such a conflict? If they should yield, would not the latent animosities of race and race still remain, to break out into wars which, under such conditions, must result in servitude or extermination?

He saw that, in the absence of widespread war, the world would soon reach a maximum population, and that children must cease . . . or, perhaps, an occasional child might be permitted to replace an accidental death . . . or a large number of children to replace the wastage of war. Would the race remain capable of these occasional fertilities? Or would it arrive at a position at which its numbers would be reduced (however slowly) by occasional misadventures, and these reductions would be irreplaceable?

Or if children should remain a potential possibility, would not the desire for them become at times irresistible with at least many of the unoccupied women? Might they not welcome a war which would throw upon them the duty of replacement?

He was roused from these visions by the consciousness that he was at Mrs. Empsey's bedside.

It was some years since Mrs. Empsey had walked across her bedroom

floor. Her daughter, Ada, waited on her without complaint, and earned a little money by sewing and taking care of the neighbors' children. It was many years since Joe Horton had asked for any rent for the cottage. They had a few shillings weekly from the parish. So they lived.

Dr. Merson had not sent in a bill for ten years past. He never thought of doing so. He had fought as hard for Mrs. Empsey's life as for that of his wealthiest patient. It was all in the day's work.

But he had not been able to cure her. Indeed, he had not hoped to do so. Even now, he was not certain that her damaged interior could be reconstructed, though he could give her a new vitality. But he hoped, even for that. Anyway, she would be about again, and Ada could marry the booking-clerk at Belsham station, who had courted her long enough. They were both over thirty. Here was one of the first places to which his discovery would bring a joy almost beyond imagination. Mrs. Empsey had always clung to life with a desperate cowardice. But even here he would do nothing—would say nothing—too hastily. The whole prospect was so stupendous.

He checked himself in writing a prescription which would have placed his patient beyond the power of any drug to revive her. . . . That was another thought. . . . The power of poisons would continue. . . . If the certainty of death were removed, would the dread of such contingencies be increased until life would become an intolerable care to avoid them? Only experience could resolve that problem.

6

Out of much confusion, a thought came in the end, clearly born out of chaos. If he were right that his discovery could give perpetual youth to mankind, it could only mean that a limited number of people would live long, where, otherwise, a larger number of people would have lived for a shorter time. Putting aside all theories of a future life, all the speculations or dogmatisms of religion, its only result could be to make the single life longer, and the individual lives less numerous. Finally, therefore, it could only be advantageous if it resulted in higher and happier conditions of life than those which were prevailing around him. It would abolish children. It would abolish age. It would make youth perpetual. Youth was the desire of all men. Those who were young desired to retain it. Those who were old would give anything they had to recover it. So much was clear—if he were only sure. Aiming to abolish age, might it not be found—and perhaps too late—that it was youth that had left the world?

By all outward evidences, the rat had regained its youth. Why should he doubt that it was the perpetuity of youth which he would offer to a grateful world? Perhaps he vexed himself because his own mind was too small to understand the greatness of his own discovery.

Yet, could youth be perpetual? Youth was not only of the body, it was of the spirit. He did not know . . . As a doctor, he was predisposed to consider the physical as dominant. But the freshness of youth——?

He considered another possibility. Perhaps age would come, though more gradually, as the spirit tired. Then the body might be periodically inoculated to a new youth, as he had done to the rat, with all the joy of a returning springtime. "If youth but knew!" How many men had wasted youth, and longed for its return in vain, when they had gained the experience which would have valued it more highly, and used it differently! To unite the experience of age with youth's vitality! . . . and then he saw his delusion . . . the joy of

youth is not of experience, but of inexperience. It is because the adventure is new: the path untrodden.

He considered himself. He did not feel old. He was forty-three. He knew that he must appear old to the young people around him. If he were unmarried, and should he ask a young girl to share his life, she might make it a jest to her companions.

But he had a good constitution, and he had lived temperately. His body was still strong and vigorous. Yet he had not the outlook of youth. He realized that his youth would not return, though twenty years should be taken from the age of his body.

With a sudden clarity he realized that, to regain his youth, it was not so much a new body which would be needed; that which he had would serve his purpose well enough, could it only throw off the appearances of thinning hair and growing corpulence, which disguised it from the youth around it; it was a new youth of the soul, an intervening Lethe, which would be needed. . . . He had made no discovery in that direction. Physically, youth might continue, but, as the millenniums passed—even the centuries . . .

7

He made efforts to regain the standpoint of his own youth, that he might explore its differences. He became absent-minded in reminiscence. . . . He used to write poetry then. He had not done anything quite so foolish for many years. All the same, he had done it rather well. The only weak point was that the poems were usually left unfinished. It was so much easier to get the first lines. The memories of youth moved him to the old impulse. With a sudden keen recovery of emotion he remembered his first meeting with Molly . . . the picnic under the trees . . . the first shy kiss on her shoulder. . . . That was before he had gone to college. . . . He had always been loyal to her, and she to him. . . . He was not of the shallower sort of those that change lightly. . . . He loved her now as he had loved her then—but oh! the world between. . . .

I can not stand where once I stood. It takes
a life to learn
That none may steer his course to shear the
trail of light astern.

That was well expressed. He would have written those lines down twenty years ago. He would have intended to make them into a complete poem. But he knew better now. He knew that they would never be finished. He knew so much—about himself, and others. He even knew his own weaknesses.

That was the trouble. The inexperience of youth was something which could never be recovered, and the experience of age was no substitute. He realized that to abolish age is to abolish youth also.

Seeing this, his mind startled itself with a further possibility—might it be equally true to say that to abolish death would be to abolish life? In a moment's vision he saw life and death in a conflict from which each wins recurrent victory: he saw them interdependent, and this strife as the condition on which they both existed. . . .

8

He imagined his discovery applied to the vegetable world; an oak tree in perpetual vigor. . . . Would there be no place left for fruit-time and harvest? For the young growths of spring? There was the question of food—corn must still be grown for food, and mown down in due season—or perhaps there might be developed roots of a continuing vigor? But the question of food was not merely a human one. All life grew by feeding upon the life around it.

This was fundamental. It had an aspect of cruel rapacity, seeming in-

consistent with the idea of a beneficent God. Yet if there be mortality at all, there can be no better end to the outworn or defeated body than to support the vigor of a new life. . . . His mind stooped, bewildered once again before the stupendous nature of the change which his discovery must bring to the earth's economy.

Perhaps the question was too great for one man to face. Would it not be well to announce his discovery, and for some small committee of selected men to consider whether it should be used? . . . But he knew that there would be no such question in the minds of men. They might doubt its advantages for other men, for alien races, for animal or vegetable creations, but for themselves there would be no doubt at all.

It was true that he might withhold the discovery itself, and merely announce that he possessed it, but even that announcement (if it were believed) might rouse an excitement that he could not estimate. . . . He imagined himself mobbed, beaten, even tortured, till he should consent to reveal it to a frantic world. . . .

Pacing the laboratory restlessly, distracted with such thoughts as these, afraid to meet the reproaches of his wife, who could not understand why he was changed and aging so rapidly, so that he had acquired a habit of remaining there till it should be time to go out on his daily round, he regarded the rat, now running up the bars of his cage in a restless and tireless activity, with sudden hatred. He would kill the loathsome thing, and forget the horror he had discovered. Perhaps he might enjoy life once again. . . .

He looked at his watch, and was startled to see that it was half an hour after the usual time at which he set out on his daily round—and he had a consultation with Sir William Brett at 10:30. He went out hurriedly.

9

SCHOOL was just commencing that morning when Peter Corner left it. He owed his freedom to his ability to take unscrupulous advantage of the caprice of circumstance, and the credulity of his fellows. His two sisters had colds, and his mother had kept them at home. Had he reported to his schoolmistress that his mother suspected measles he would have incurred the risk of ultimate retribution, which he was always adroit to avoid. Instead of that, he made the remark to Jessie Phipson, who could be relied upon to report it promptly. Challenged on the point, he strenuously denied the truth of the suggestion. His mother had never said so. He had told Jessie that they had not got measles *nor* scarlet fever. The mistress did not know what to believe, and sent him home till she could obtain more reliable information. He had expected that.

His expression was almost good-tempered as he dragged his clubfoot toward Dr. Merson's surgery. His sisters usually called for his mother's medicine, but as they had not come to school today the duty fell to him. He did not like going there. He hated Dr. Merson. He hated his eyes, which seemed to see through him without effort, and then to look elsewhere, as though he were not worth seeing. But he had to go today, and he had a hopeful idea this morning. He did not expect to get the medicine before noon. He knew that the doctor was not at home during the mornings. But he could not be blamed for calling on his way home.

He found the surgery door unlocked, as it was sometimes left when Dr. Merson was absent. He had expected that. He knew when and whether most of the doors in Belsham were locked or open. He did not often make use of this knowledge. His physical deformity, and the practical

difficulties of secreting or disposing of illicit gains, had withheld him from active dishonesties. But in his waking dreams (for he had them, as much as more attractive children) he was most often a cat burglar of superhuman audacities.

Had he rung the surgery bell, the maid would have come, or the doctor's wife, but he turned the handle without haste or hesitation, and stood quietly inside, in an attitude of respectful waiting, till he was reassured by the surrounding silence. Then he passed through to the passage. He could not move very quietly, but a sound of crockery in the distant kitchen reassured him, and—beyond his hopes—the key was in the door on the other side of the passage.

Dr. Merson did not often experiment with living animals, but it was generally known that he held a vivisection certificate. It was the dream of Peter's life to enter that room, and view the horrors which he vaguely imagined to be concealed behind the frosted glass that could be seen sideways from the road, if you forced your face sufficiently far between the palings.

Now the door was not even locked, though the key was in it. Peter opened it quietly, entered, and closed it behind him.

10

DR. MERSON had not gone far when he was vexed by a doubt as to whether he had locked the door. He was almost sure that he had—yes, he was quite sure—but he felt vaguely uneasy. He felt for the key in its usual pocket, but it was not there. He felt in his other pockets, with the same result. He must have left it in the door. He felt sure now that he had turned the key, but not removed it. That was what had made his mind uneasy. Really, it didn't matter. No one of his household would enter the room under such circumstances. Certainly Molly wouldn't. She hated the room, and never entered it except to seek him. More certainly still, the maid would not venture. She would not enter to dust it. Not that he wanted her to. Women are a curse where a man works. But he knew her feeling. It was, in fact, her talk in the village which was mainly responsible for the fact that Peter Corner was now inside it. But Dr. Merson didn't know that. He only thought that if the women of his household found the door locked and the key outside they would know that he couldn't be in, and would be unlikely to enter. But was he sure he had locked it?

Probably he wouldn't have turned back, being so late already, had he not discovered, to his added annoyance, that he had left behind some clinical notes which he should require at the consultation for which he was late already.

He went back hastily. On the way, he made a resolution that he would kill the rat that night, and destroy the serum he had invented. He perceived, with a sudden clarity, that the world's Creator might understand His job better than a local practitioner in Belsham village.

The relief that the decision gave him confirmed its wisdom. He was in better spirits than he had been for many weeks as he passed through the surgery, and crossed the passage to the room beyond.

* * * * * * * *

Sir William Brett waited for over half an hour at the house of the patient for the benefit of whose health, and relief of whose pocket, the consultation had been arranged. Then he rang up Dr. Merson's house for an explanation. He received a reply (after some delay) that the doctor had been seized with a sudden indisposition, and greatly regretted that the appointment must be deferred until the following day.

11

The inquest on the body of Peter Corner had been twice adjourned by a coroner who had known Dr. Merson sufficiently well to regard it as incredible that he should have committed a crime so strange and so inexplicable. He hoped that the doctor might be found, and that his voluntary return would furnish some satisfactory explanation. But the police had not been retarded by any similar hesitation. Within twenty-four hours of the doctor's disappearance the dismembered body of Peter Corner had been discovered, and the facts that the doctor could not be found, and that he had drawn nearly four hundred pounds (practically the whole of his available balance) from his bank in Treasury notes on the previous day, had enabled them to obtain a warrant for his arrest without difficulty.

But the warrant had not been executed.

Dr. Merson had walked to the station quite openly. He had chatted with casual acquaintances on the platform. He had even got into a compartment containing others who knew him. He had traveled to London, saying that he was in search of certain surgical instruments which he required to renew, and had disappeared absolutely.

It was agreed that he had been in particularly good spirits. Indeed — and this was one of the minor mysteries of the case—there had been a noticeable change in his demeanor from the morning when Peter had been seen to enter the door of his surgery. Everyone had noticed the change. It was as though a load of fear or trouble had been suddenly lifted from him.

Mrs. Merson—who had insisted on giving evidence, in spite of the coroner's warning—had confirmed this. She had entered the witness box to urge her conviction, against the weight of overwhelming evidence, that he had not murdered Peter at all, and to assert that he had himself been living in dread of some mysterious enemy, who must be responsible both for the fate of Peter, and for her husband's disappearance.

Her evidence, given with the convincing simplicity of an unimaginative mind, had impressed its hearers with her sincerity, and increased the sympathy with which she was regarded, but it could not shake the weight of evidence which placed the crime upon the shoulders of the absent doctor.

It was admitted by the police that the doctor could not have known that Peter would be released from school on the fatal morning, but their theory was that he had met the boy by chance in the street, and had recognized an unexpected opportunity for the commission of a crime which had been designed within his mind previously. He had told the boy to go to the surgery, and await his return. He had followed immediately, by a different route, entering the surgery unobserved, and promptly disposed of his unsuspecting victim. His household admitted that they had not known that he was at home till the telephone enquiry from Sir William Brett had caused them to seek him, and he had then replied through a half-opened door, that he was unwell, and the appointment must be deferred to the following day.

He had callously proceeded to the dissection of his victim's body, and it was only when the police had traced the missing boy to his own door, and the enquiries had become too close and pointed for his comfort, that he had decided that it would be best to bolt, without delaying for the added risk of attempting the destruction or removal of the dismembered corpse.

Such was the theory of the police, and while it failed to offer the explanation of any adequate motive for a deed so ghastly, and a risk so great, and while there was nothing in the

doctor's previous record to support the suggestion of criminality at once so gross and so reckless, yet it had the advantage of meeting the admitted facts more plausibly than appeared otherwise possible, and even those who were least willing to believe that the doctor could have been guilty of such a murder were unable to put forward any reasonable supposition which could explain the presence of the boy's remains on his premises, and his subsequent flight and silence.

12

It was now two months since Dr. Merson had alighted at Paddington, and been seen to make a leisurely descent of the stairs to the Underground station which adjoins that terminus. Doubtless, the police would continue their enquiries, and the public would continue to keep them occupied with abortive "clues", but the coroner could see no reason for adjourning the inquest further, nor means of avoiding the obvious verdict which the jury would be expected to render. It would place him under the painful necessity of issuing a warrant against an old friend, of whose guilt his own mind was not easily convinced, but that would be of no practical importance, in view of the magistrate's warrant, on which the police were already acting. (The time had not arrived at which this duplication of procedure was reformed in practise).

He had no further evidence to bring forward, except that of Sir Lionel Tipshift, the Home Office expert, who had conducted the postmortem on the dismembered body, and would give his opinion upon the cause of death with the air of Olympic impartiality on which the police had relied so often for the hanging of suspected persons.

The coroner's court was small, and crowded. It was a rainy day, and the atmosphere within it was one of depression, and of damp umbrellas. The room was plainly furnished with a table for the legal profession, an armchair for the coroner, a partitioned corner for the jury, and some benches for the use of the waiting witnesses, and the general public. It was clean, and its windows were wide and high. Yet it had an aspect of invincible grime, as though it were washed incessantly and vainly to remove an ingrained dirt, against which no physical assault could be directed successfully.

Mrs. Merson sat on the front bench, looking grave, but not acutely miserable. Her husband's cousin, Mr. Reginald Merson, sat beside her. This gentleman, of whose existence she had not known previously, had arrived from the Argentine about six weeks after Dr. Merson had disappeared. He had made a casual call upon a cousin whom he had not seen for over twenty years, and finding himself in the midst of circumstances so strange and tragic, and having time at his disposal, he had offered such help as he could give to his cousin's wife by remaining until the inquest should be over. He had declined her invitation to reside in the house, preferring to take a room at the *Spotted Cow,* but this discretion had not prevented some unkindly gossip, which had attributed Mrs. Merson's equanimity to the very opportune companionship which he was able to offer.

On this point gossip was not entirely wrong, but the emotions of the doctor's wife, being beyond her own analysis, were not likely to be understood by the observations of strangers. She had not wavered in her loyalty to her absent husband, nor had her affection lessened. She held a matter-of-course opinion that he had not murdered anyone; she was quite sure that he was not dead; and she was equally sure that he would return at his own time, and deal with the situation with his usual efficiency. The whole trouble was the work of some

enmity, as to the nature of which, as was natural in the case of one who was destitute of normal imagination, her imaginations were very wild indeed.

Mr. Reginald Merson attracted and sometimes bewildered her by a likeness, not so much to her husband as she had last seen him, as to that which he had been at the time of their engagement, and during the first years of her married life. His voice, though stronger in tone, was curiously similar: his hair, though abundant, whereas her husband had become partially bald, was of the same color and quality—or, perhaps, very slightly darker. His features were alike, except for the short hair on the upper lip, and even that was a reminder of how her husband once had worn it. He was slow and guarded in speech, but, even so, he would let fall remarks at times which showed a puzzling familiarity with the past events of the household.

She did not disguise from herself that his presence gave her confidence, though there was mystery even in that, for he never spoke with any conviction of the doctor's innocence, nor suggested that he might return and vindicate his reputation, and any plans he might casually indicate for her future appeared to assume that the doctor's disappearance was to be accepted as final.

Inspector Clawson, who was in charge of the case, had not overlooked the strangeness of the arrival of this young man, and his curiosity had been increased when he had failed to trace the name of Merson on the passenger lists of any recently arriving liners. He did not see how Mr. Reginald Merson could be associated with the crime, in the absence of any evidence that he had been in the neighborhood when it was committed, but he felt that he was a source from which valuable information might be obtained, that he might very probably be aware of the place in which the doctor was hiding, and might very possibly be induced to speak, if the penalties which are incurred by an accessory after the fact were judiciously indicated.

He had him watched, and discovered nothing. He appeared to have no acquaintances, except Mrs. Merson. He wrote no letters. He received none. The inspector decided to interview him.

Mr. Reginald received him genially. He alluded to the murder at once, and condoned with him on his failure to make any arrest. The position seemed to amuse him. The inspector could not see the joke, and did not like the tone he adopted. He asserted, with a confidence that he did not feel, that he expected that an arrest would soon be made. "Scotland Yard," he lied with the boldness of exasperation, "always gets its man in the end."

Mr. Reginald suggested humorously that he might himself be the doctor in disguise. Would the inspector like to arrest him? The inspector would have liked to do so very well, had a sufficient pretext arisen. He had already considered the possibility which was now suggested in an obvious mockery. The appearance of this mysterious cousin, at such a time, and of so vague an origin, would have attracted the notice of the dullest detective of fiction, and Inspector Clawson was a very capable officer.

But his judgment was too sound to lead him into an error so obvious. He knew how much may be done by disguise, and he knew its limitations. He had never seen Dr. Merson, but he had examined some recent photographs. He knew his age. He had discussed his appearance with local members of the force, who had seen him daily.

Between the suddenly disappearing doctor and the suddenly arriving cousin there were more than the usual cousinly resemblances. But the differences were beyond the possibilities of disguise or explanation. A bald

man can not disguise himself with a thick crop of natural hair. A man of a growing rotundity can not disguise himself in a few weeks by the production of a slim and obviously youthful figure. A man of forty-five can not disguise himself into an appearance of half his age which will deceive the hostile eyes of a detective who is standing two feet away in the open street, when the morning is sunny.

Inspector Clawson only remarked that it was a fine day.

13

THAT was yesterday. In the coroner's court this morning the inspector's eyes were still drawn in the same direction. He was not greatly interested in the evidence of Sir Lionel Tipshift. For one reason, he knew what it was to be, and for another, he had no respect for the expert witness. He is useful to impress juries, but the police and lawyers knew that another can always be procured to contradict him. Sir Lionel Tipshift was a tame expert, regularly hired by the Crown. The nature of his evidence could be relied upon as certainly as that a prosecuting counsel would not point out the probable innocence of the prisoner against whom his brief was drawn.

So the inspector's attention wandered when Sir Lionel, with a manner suggesting that he was slightly bored by his own infallibility, gave the result of his post-mortem examination.

The body, he assured the court, had been disjointed after death — probably several hours later—by someone with considerable knowledge of anatomy. The internal organs had been preserved, and (with some technical qualifications) were healthy. There was no trace of poison. There were marks of violence upon the body, including certain bruises on the legs, which must have been caused before death, by some blunt instrument. (That was correct. They had been inflicted by Bunny Simpson's foot in the school playground on the afternoon before Peter's existence had abruptly terminated.)

The listeners were hypnotized by the coldly decisive voice to the belief that additional and important evidence had been given. The coroner only, being accustomed to analyze evidence, was conscious that nothing had been added to that which was already known, or could have been reasonably deduced from admitted circumstances, and he was about to address a final word to the jury, when Mr. Reginald Merson rose, and asked, in a deferential but self-possessed manner, if, as the nearest male relative of the absent doctor, whose reputation was so much concerned, the unfortunate death having taken place on his premises, he might ask Sir Lionel Tipshift a few questions upon the evidence he had given.

The coroner hesitated. A coroner's enquiry is somewhat less formal than are the proceedings in the criminal courts. Possibly the fact that not all coroners belong to the legal profession (many are doctors) may have produced a less rigid etiquette for preventing oral intercourse of any kind except through the medium of a paid lawyer. But it is not usual for a witness to be examined in such a manner. He was about to say that he would himself put any enquiry which he might approve, if Mr. Merson would let him know what was in his mind, when that gentleman, taking his pause of hesitation for consent, addressed a question to Sir Lionel Tipshift which was sufficiently unexpected to cause him to remain silent to await the answer.

"Can you tell me if any other body was discovered in the laboratory, besides that of Peter Corner?"

Sir Lionel, who had already moved

some paces from the witness stand, turned back, as he answered with a dry precision:

"There were no other human remains. Dr. Merson appears to have been engaged in the dissection of a recently killed rat, on the last occasion on which he occupied the laboratory."

"Does not the fact that he could have been so occupied, at such a time, with the boy's body upon his hands, suggest that there must have been some connection between the two?" Mr. Reginald asked, but the coroner interposed before Sir Lionel could answer.

"If you have any information which may be of assistance to this enquiry, Mr. Merson, I must ask you to take the oath, and offer your evidence in the usual way; it can not be given in the form of suggestions to another witness."

Mr. Merson did not appear either disconcerted or annoyed by this rebuke. He answered easily. He apologized for his ignorance of the correct procedure. He regretted that he was not in a position to accept the coroner's offer. It had only occurred to him—and he submitted the suggestion with diffidence—that the doctor might have suddenly returned, having remembered, after starting out, that he had not locked the room in accordance with his usual practise, and found the boy trespassing within it. Suppose that the rat had been inoculated with some new and dreadful disease, and the boy had interfered with it, and been bitten, so that he would be certain to contract it, and would not only die himself, but might give it to others, would it not become a natural thing—even a duty, however unlawful—to take *any* steps, at whatever personal risk, to prevent such consequences?

The court listened in a tense silence to this unexpected theory, but Sir Lionel, though he had not been addressed, gave a reply which disposed of its probability, the coroner silently allowing his interposition, with the respect which was usually accorded to his name and title.

"The rat was not diseased. It was a remarkably fine specimen. Indeed, it was the finest and healthiest that I have ever seen. There were remarkable signs of vitality in every organ."

"Then, if it were so exceptional in its physical development, might it not have sprung at the boy's throat, when he opened the door of its cage—which would be about at the same level—and inflicted a serious, or even a fatal wound?"

Sir Lionel, who was seldom disinclined to the sound of his own voice, was about to answer, but his opinion on this point will never be known, for this time the coroner interposed too quickly.

"I don't think, Mr. Merson, that anything can be gained by pursuing hypothetical improbabilities. Such explanations, if put forward at all, should have come from Dr. Merson himself, or from some regularly appointed advocate on his behalf. I am not aware that you have any claim to represent him at all, beyond that of an alleged relationship, and even that has not been sworn to. Dr. Merson is absent. He went away voluntarily, leaving the body of this unhappy boy on his premises, at a time when he knew that enquiries were turning in his direction. I am afraid that the jury will draw their own conclusions."

He paused a moment, and then commenced a brief and lucid charge to the jury, from which a verdict of wilful murder against the absent doctor might be confidently expected.

Mr. Reginald Merson turned to the woman beside him, and said something in a low voice, on which she smiled, and rose with him. Evidently they did not propose to wait to hear the verdict given. The ease and confidence of his own demeanor appeared to have infected his companion, and

she passed out somewhat briskly and buoyantly, as one who leaves an unpleasant incident with finality.

As they went down the steps which led to the street, Inspector Clawson touched Mr. Merson's arm, and he turned politely.

"I should just like to ask," said the inspector, "how you came to know that the boy opened the cage."

Mr. Merson appeared amused. "I dreamt it on Monday night, Inspector. I'm rather good at dreams," he added pleasantly.

The inspector's hand was in his pocket. His fingers closed upon the warrant which he was carrying. If only he had the courage to make the arrest to which his instinct urged him! It might make—or break—him. He became aware that Mr. Merson was speaking to him again, and in a voice of banter.

"It's no good, Inspector. You won't get a word more. The voluntary statement's played out. . . . It's no use worrying," he said kindly; "you'd better go home, and forget it."

The inspector felt that the advice was sound, though he did not like it. He thought of his wife and children, and of the comfortable pension which awaits the later years of frequently promoted officers who do not make mistakes which arouse adverse newspaper comment. He turned sadly away.

14

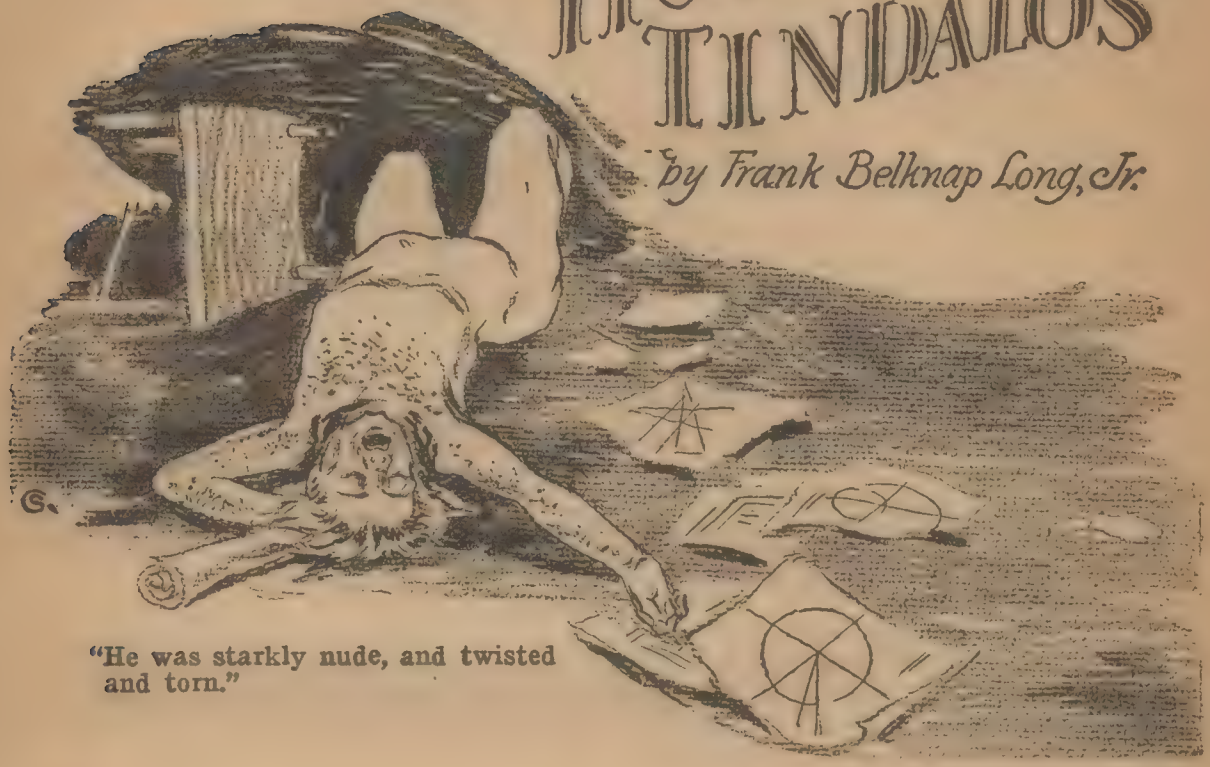
Dr. Merson walked home very happily, beside a wife who did not know him. He was very fond of Molly. He wondered (as he had done before) if the time had come to show her the birthmark on his left arm. He wondered whether it would be expedient to use the hypodermic syringe in his right-hand pocket, which would restore her youth, and give her the vitality which he was already experiencing. He liked her very well as she was, but he did not doubt that he should like her quite as well if she were looking twenty years younger. But he was not quite clear as to the pretext on which he should make the injection. Not quite clear, either, that it would be morally defensible to do it without explaining its results beforehand. He felt that to convince her of the actual truth would not be the easiest of mental enterprises. But he felt also that, if she should be led to share his experiences, she would admit his identity more readily than would be otherwise probable.

Still, there was no hurry. There might even be advantages in delay. He imagined Inspector Clawson studying the metamorphosis of the wife of the missing doctor. It would be amusing. It could hardly be dangerous. Still, it was a needless risk. There was no hurry.

Yes—he would come in to tea.

The HOUNDS of TINDALOS

by Frank Belknap Long, Jr.



"He was starkly nude, and twisted and torn."

"I'M GLAD you came," said Chalmers. He was sitting by the window and his face was very pale. Two tall candles guttered at his elbow and cast a sickly amber light over his long nose and slightly receding chin. Chalmers would have nothing modern about his apartment. He had the soul of a mediæval ascetic, and he preferred illuminated manuscripts to automobiles and leering stone gargoyles to radios and adding-machines.

As I crossed the room to the settee he had cleared for me I glanced at his desk and was surprized to discover that he had been studying the mathematical formulæ of a celebrated contemporary physicist, and that he had covered many sheets of thin yellow paper with curious geometric designs.

"Einstein and John Dee are strange bedfellows," I said as my gaze wandered from his mathematical charts to the sixty or seventy quaint books that comprised his strange little library. Plotinus and Emanuel Moscopulus, St. Thomas Aquinas and Frenicle de Bessy stood elbow to elbow in the somber ebony bookcase, and chairs, table and desk were littered with pamphlets about mediæval sorcery and witchcraft and black magic, and all of the valiant glamorous things that the modern world has repudiated.

Chalmers smiled engagingly, and passed me a Russian cigarette on a curiously carved tray. "We are just discovering now," he said, "that the old alchemists and sorcerers were two-thirds *right*, and that your modern biologist and materialist is nine-tenths *wrong*."

"You have always scoffed at modern science," I said, a little impatiently.

"Only at scientific dogmatism," he replied. "I have always been a rebel, a champion of originality and lost

causes; that is why I have chosen to repudiate the conclusions of contemporary biologists."

"And Einstein?" I asked.

"A priest of transcendental mathematics!" he murmured reverently. "A profound mystic and explorer of the great *suspected.*"

"Then you do not entirely despise science."

"Of course not," he affirmed. "I merely distrust the scientific positivism of the past fifty years, the positivism of Haeckel and Darwin and of Mr. Bertrand Russell. I believe that biology has failed pitifully to explain the mystery of man's origin and destiny."

"Give them time," I retorted.

Chalmers' eyes glowed. "My friend," he murmured, "your pun is sublime. Give them *time.* That is precisely what I would do. But your modern biologist scoffs at time. He has the key but he refuses to use it. What do we know of time, really? Einstein believes that it is relative, that it can be interpreted in terms of space, of *curved* space. But must we stop there? When mathematics fails us can we not advance by—insight?"

"You are treading on dangerous ground," I replied. "That is a pitfall that your true investigator avoids. That is why modern science has advanced so slowly. It accepts nothing that it can not demonstrate. But you——"

"I would take hashish, opium, all manner of drugs. I would emulate the sages of the East. And then perhaps I would apprehend——"

"What?"

"The fourth dimension."

"Theosophical rubbish!"

"Perhaps. But I believe that drugs expand human consciousness. William James agreed with me. And I have discovered a new one."

"A new drug?"

"It was used centuries ago by Chinese alchemists, but it is virtually unknown in the West. Its occult properties are amazing. With its aid and the aid of my mathematical knowledge I believe that I can *go back through time.*"

"I do not understand."

"Time is merely our imperfect perception of a new dimension of space. Time and motion are both illusions. Everything that has existed from the beginning of the world *exists now.* Events that occurred centuries ago on this planet continue to exist in another dimension of space. Events that will occur centuries from now *exist already.* We can not perceive their existence because we can not enter the dimension of space that contains them. Human beings as we know them are merely fractions, infinitesimally small fractions of one enormous whole. Every human being is linked with *all* the life that has preceded him on this planet. All of his ancestors are parts of him. Only time separates him from his forebears, and time is an illusion and does not exist."

"I think I understand," I murmured.

"It will be sufficient for my purpose if you can form a vague idea of what I wish to achieve. I wish to strip from my eyes the veils of illusion that time has thrown over them, and see the *beginning and the end.*"

"And you think this new drug will help you?"

"I am sure that it will. And I want you to help me. I intend to take the drug immediately. I can not wait. I must *see.*" His eyes glittered strangely. "I am going back, back through time."

He rose and strode to the mantel. When he faced me again he was holding a small square box in the palm of his hand. "I have here five pellets of the drug Liao. It was used by the Chinese philosopher Lao Tze, and while under its influence he visioned Tao. Tao is the most mysterious force in the world; it surrounds and pervades all things; it contains the visible universe and everything that we

call reality. He who apprehends the mysteries of Tao sees clearly all that was and will be."

"Rubbish!" I retorted.

"Tao resembles a great animal, recumbent, motionless, containing in its enormous body all the worlds of our universe, the past, the present and the future. We see portions of this great monster through a slit, which we call time. With the aid of this drug I shall enlarge the slit. I shall behold the great figure of life, the great recumbent beast in its entirety."

"And what do you wish me to do?"

"Watch, my friend. Watch and take notes. And if I go back too far you must recall me to reality. You can recall me by shaking me violently. If I appear to be suffering acute physical pain you must recall me at once."

"Chalmers," I said, "I wish you wouldn't make this experiment. You are taking dreadful risks. I don't believe that there is any fourth dimension and I emphatically do not believe in Tao. And I don't approve of your experimenting with unknown drugs."

"I know the properties of this drug," he replied. "I know precisely how it affects the human animal and I know its dangers. The risk does not reside in the drug itself. My only fear is that I may become lost in time. You see, I shall assist the drug. Before I swallow this pellet I shall give my undivided attention to the geometric and algebraic symbols that I have traced on this paper." He raised the mathematical chart that rested on his knee. "I shall prepare my mind for an excursion into time. I shall *approach* the fourth dimension with my conscious mind before I take the drug which will enable me to exercise occult powers of perception. Before I enter the dream world of the Eastern mystics I shall acquire all of the mathematical help that modern science can offer. This mathematical knowledge, this conscious approach to an actual apprehension of the fourth dimension of time will supplement the work of the drug. The drug will open up stupendous new vistas—the mathematical preparation will enable me to grasp them intellectually. I have often grasped the fourth dimension in dreams, emotionally, intuitively, but I have never been able to recall, in waking life, the occult splendors that were momentarily revealed to me.

"But with your aid, I believe that I can recall them. You will take down everything that I say while I am under the influence of the drug. No matter how strange or incoherent my speech may become you will omit nothing. When I awake I may be able to supply the key to whatever is mysterious or incredible. I am not sure that I shall succeed, but if I *do* succeed"—his eyes were strangely luminous—*"time will exist for me no longer!"*

He sat down abruptly. "I shall make the experiment at once. Please stand over there by the window and watch. Have you a fountain pen?"

I nodded gloomily and removed a pale green Waterman from my upper vest pocket.

"And a pad, Frank?"

I groaned and produced a memorandum book. "I emphatically disapprove of this experiment," I muttered. "You're taking a frightful risk."

"Don't be an asinine old woman!" he admonished. "Nothing that you can say will induce me to stop now. I entreat you to remain silent while I study these charts."

He raised the charts and studied them intently. I watched the clock on the mantel as it ticked out the seconds, and a curious dread clutched at my heart so that I choked.

Suddenly the clock stopped ticking, and exactly at that moment Chalmers swallowed the drug.

I ROSE quickly and moved toward him, but his eyes implored me not to interfere. "The clock has stopped,"

he murmured. "The forces that control it approve of my experiment. *Time* stopped, and I swallowed the drug. I pray God that I shall not lose my way."

He closed his eyes and leaned back on the sofa. All of the blood had left his face and he was breathing heavily. It was clear that the drug was acting with extraordinary rapidity.

"It is beginning to get dark," he murmured. "Write that. It is beginning to get dark and the familiar objects in the room are fading out. I can discern them vaguely through my eyelids but they are fading swiftly."

I shook my pen to make the ink come and wrote rapidly in shorthand as he continued to dictate.

"I am leaving the room. The walls are vanishing and I can no longer see any of the familiar objects. Your face, though, is still visible to me. I hope that you are writing. I think that I am about to make a great leap —a leap through space. Or perhaps it is through time that I shall make the leap. I can not tell. Everything is dark, indistinct."

He sat for a while silent, with his head sunk upon his breast. Then suddenly he stiffened and his eyelids fluttered open. "God in heaven!" he cried. "I *see!*"

He was straining forward in his chair, staring at the opposite wall. But I knew that he was looking beyond the wall and that the objects in the room no longer existed for him. "Chalmers," I cried, "Chalmers, shall I wake you?"

"Do not!" he shrieked. "I see *everything*. All of the billions of lives that preceded me on this planet are before me at this moment. I see men of all ages, all races, all colors. They are fighting, killing, building, dancing, singing. They are sitting about rude fires on lonely gray deserts, and flying through the air in monoplanes. They are riding the seas in bark canoes and enormous steamships; they are painting bison and mammoths on the walls of dismal caves and covering huge canvases with queer futuristic designs. I watch the migrations from Atlantis. I watch the migrations from Lemuria. I see the elder races—a strange horde of black dwarfs overwhelming Asia and the Neandertalers with lowered heads and bent knees ranging obscenely across Europe. I watch the Achæans streaming into the Greek islands, and the crude beginnings of Hellenic culture. I am in Athens and Pericles is young. I am standing on the soil of Italy. I assist in the rape of the Sabines; I march with the Imperial Legions. I tremble with awe and wonder as the enormous standards go by and the ground shakes with the tread of the victorious *hastati*. A thousand naked slaves grovel before me as I pass in a litter of gold and ivory drawn by night-black oxen from Thebes, and the flower-girls scream *'Ave Cæsar'* as I nod and smile. I am myself a slave on a Moorish galley. I watch the erection of a great cathedral. Stone by stone it rises, and through months and years I stand and watch each stone as it falls into place. I am burned on a cross head downward in the thyme-scented gardens of Nero, and I watch with amusement and scorn the torturers at work in the chambers of the Inquisition.

"I walk in the holiest sanctuaries; I enter the temples of Venus. I kneel in adoration before the Magna Mater, and I throw coins on the bare knees of the sacred courtezans who sit with veiled faces in the groves of Babylon. I creep into an Elizabethan theater and with the stinking rabble about me I applaud *The Merchant of Venice*. I walk with Dante through the narrow streets of Florence. I meet the young Beatrice and the hem of her garment brushes my sandals as I stare enraptured. I am a priest of Isis, and my magic astounds the nations. Simon Magus kneels before me, imploring my assistance, and Pharaoh trembles

when I approach. In India I talk with the Masters and run screaming from their presence, for their revelations are as salt on wounds that bleed.

"I perceive everything *simultaneously*. I perceive everything from all sides; I am a part of all the teeming billions about me. I exist in all men and all men exist in me. I perceive the whole of human history in a single instant, the past and the present.

"By simply *straining* I can see farther and farther back. Now I am going back through strange curves and angles. Angles and curves multiply about me. I perceive great segments of time through *curves*. There is *curved time*, and *angular time*. The beings that exist in angular time can not enter curved time. It is very strange.

"I am going back and back. Man has disappeared from the earth. Gigantic reptiles crouch beneath enormous palms and swim through the loathly black waters of dismal lakes. Now the reptiles have disappeared. No animals remain upon the land, but beneath the waters, plainly visible to me, dark forms move slowly over the rotting vegetation.

"The forms are becoming simpler and simpler. Now they are single cells. All about me there are angles —strange angles that have no counterparts on the earth. I am desperately afraid.

"There is an abyss of being which man has never fathomed."

I stared. Chalmers had risen to his feet and he was gesticulating helplessly with his arms. "I am passing through *unearthly* angles; I am approaching—oh, the burning horror of it!"

"Chalmers!" I cried. "Do you wish me to interfere?"

He brought his right hand quickly before his face, as though to shut out a vision unspeakable. "Not yet!" he cried; "I will go on. I will see—what—lies—beyond——"

A cold sweat streamed from his forehead and his shoulders jerked spasmodically. "Beyond life there are"—his face grew ashen with terror —"*things* that I can not distinguish. They move slowly through angles. They have no bodies, and they move slowly through outrageous angles."

It was then that I became aware of the odor in the room. It was a pungent, indescribable odor, so nauseous that I could scarcely endure it. I stepped quickly to the window and threw it open. When I returned to Chalmers and looked into his eyes I nearly fainted.

"I think they have scented me!" he shrieked. "They are slowly turning toward me."

He was trembling horribly. For a moment he clawed at the air with his hands. Then his legs gave way beneath him and he fell forward on his face, slobbering and moaning.

I watched him in silence as he dragged himself across the floor. He was no longer a man. His teeth were bared and saliva dripped from the corners of his mouth.

"Chalmers," I cried. "Chalmers, stop it! Stop it, do you hear?"

As if in reply to my appeal he commenced to utter hoarse convulsive sounds which resembled nothing so much as the barking of a dog, and began a sort of hideous writhing in a circle about the room. I bent and seized him by the shoulders. Violently, desperately, I shook him. He turned his head and snapped at my wrist. I was sick with horror, but I dared not release him for fear that he would destroy himself in a paroxysm of rage.

"Chalmers," I muttered, "you must stop that. There is nothing in this room that can harm you. Do you understand?"

I continued to shake and admonish him, and gradually the madness died out of his face. Shivering convulsively, he crumpled into a grotesque heap on the Chinese rug.

I CARRIED him to the sofa and deposited him upon it. His features were twisted in pain, and I knew that he was still struggling dumbly to escape from abominable memories.

"Whisky," he muttered. "You'll find a flask in the cabinet by the window—upper left-hand drawer."

When I handed him the flask his fingers tightened about it until the knuckles showed blue. "They nearly got me," he gasped. He drained the stimulant in immoderate gulps, and gradually the color crept back into his face.

"That drug was the very devil!" I murmured.

"It wasn't the drug," he moaned.

His eyes no longer glared insanely, but he still wore the look of a lost soul.

"They scented me in time," he moaned. "I went too far."

"What were *they* like?" I said, to humor him.

He leaned forward and gripped my arm. He was shivering horribly. "No word in our language can describe them!" He spoke in a hoarse whisper. "They are symbolized vaguely in the myth of the Fall, and in an obscene form which is occasionally found engraven on ancient tablets. The Greeks had a name for them, which veiled their essential foulness. The tree, the snake and the apple—these are the vague symbols of a most awful mystery."

His voice had risen to a scream. "Frank, Frank, a terrible and unspeakable *deed* was done in the beginning. Before time, the *deed*, and from the deed——"

He had risen and was hysterically pacing the room. "The seeds of the deed move through angles in dim recesses of time. They are hungry and athirst!"

"Chalmers," I pleaded to quiet him. "We are living in the third decade of the Twentieth Century."

"They are lean and athirst!" he shrieked. *"The Hounds of Tindalos!"*

"Chalmers, shall I phone for a physician?"

"A physician can not help me now. They are horrors of the soul, and yet"—he hid his face in his hands and groaned—"they are real, Frank. I saw them for a ghastly moment. For a moment I stood on the *other side*. I stood on the pale gray shores beyond time and space. In an awful light that was not light, in a silence that shrieked, I saw *them*.

"All the evil in the universe was concentrated in their lean, hungry bodies. Or had they bodies? I saw them only for a moment; I can not be certain. *But I heard them breathe.* Indescribably for a moment I felt their breath upon my face. They turned toward me and I fled screaming. In a single moment I fled screaming through time. I fled down quintillions of years.

"But they scented me. Men awake in them cosmic hungers. We have escaped, momentarily, from the foulness that rings them round. They thirst for that in us which is clean, which emerged from the deed without stain. There is a part of us which did not partake in the deed, and that they hate. But do not imagine that they are literally, prosaically evil. They are beyond good and evil as we know it. They are that which in the beginning fell away from cleanliness. Through the deed they became bodies of death, receptacles of all foulness. But they are not evil in *our* sense because in the spheres through which they move there is no thought, no morals, no right or wrong as we understand it. There is merely the pure and the foul. The foul expresses itself through angles; the pure through curves. Man, the pure part of him, is descended from a curve. Do not laugh. I mean that literally."

I rose and searched for my hat. "I'm dreadfully sorry for you, Chalmers," I said, as I walked toward the door. "But I don't intend to stay and listen to such gibberish. I'll

send my physician to see you. He's an elderly, kindly chap and he won't be offended if you tell him to go to the devil. But I hope you'll respect his advice. A week's rest in a good sanitarium should benefit you immeasurably."

I heard him laughing as I descended the stairs, but his laughter was so utterly mirthless that it moved me to tears.

2

When Chalmers phoned the following morning my first impulse was to hang up the receiver immediately. His request was so unusual and his voice was so wildly hysterical that I feared any further association with him would result in the impairment of my own sanity. But I could not doubt the genuineness of his misery, and when he broke down completely and I heard him sobbing over the wire I decided to comply with his request.

"Very well," I said. "I will come over immediately and bring the plaster."

En route to Chalmers' home I stopped at a hardware store and purchased twenty pounds of plaster of Paris. When I entered my friend's room he was crouching by the window watching the opposite wall out of eyes that were feverish with fright. When he saw me he rose and seized the parcel containing the plaster with an avidity that amazed and horrified me. He had extruded all of the furniture and the room presented a desolate appearance.

"It is just conceivable that we can thwart them!" he exclaimed. "But we must work rapidly. Frank, there is a stepladder in the hall. Bring it here immediately. And then fetch a pail of water."

"What for?" I murmured.

He turned sharply and there was a flush on his face. "To mix the plaster, you fool!" he cried. "To mix the plaster that will save our bodies and souls from a contamination unmentionable. To mix the plaster that will save the world from—Frank, *they must be kept out!*"

"Who?" I murmured.

"The Hounds of Tindalos!" he muttered. "They can only reach us through angles. We must eliminate all angles from this room. I shall plaster up all of the corners, all of the crevices. We must make this room resemble the interior of a sphere."

I knew that it would have been useless to argue with him. I fetched the stepladder, Chalmers mixed the plaster, and for three hours we labored. We filled in the four corners of the wall and the intersections of the floor and wall and the wall and ceiling, and we rounded the sharp angles of the window-seat.

"I shall remain in this room until they return in time," he affirmed when our task was completed. "When they discover that the scent leads through curves they will return. They will return ravenous and snarling and unsatisfied to the foulness that was in the beginning, before time, beyond space."

He nodded graciously and lit a cigarette. "It was good of you to help," he said.

"Will you not see a physician, Chalmers?" I pleaded.

"Perhaps — tomorrow," he murmured. "But now I must watch and wait."

"Wait for what?" I urged.

Chalmers smiled wanly. "I know that you think me insane," he said. "You have a shrewd but prosaic mind, and you can not conceive of an entity that does not depend for its existence on force and matter. But did it ever occur to you, my friend, that force and matter are merely the barriers to perception imposed by time and space? When one knows, as I do, that time and space are identical and that they are both deceptive because they are merely imperfect manifestations of a higher reality, one no

longer seeks in the visible world for an explanation of the mystery and terror of being."

I rose and walked toward the door.

"Forgive me," he cried. "I did not mean to offend you. You have a superlative intellect, but I—I have a *superhuman* one. It is only natural that I should be aware of your limitations."

"Phone if you need me," I said, and descended the stairs two steps at a time. "I'll send my physician over at once," I muttered, to myself. "He's a hopeless maniac, and heaven knows what will happen if someone doesn't take charge of him immediately."

3

THE following is a condensation of two announcements which appeared in the Partridgeville Gazette *for July 3, 1928:*

Earthquake Shakes Financial District

At 2 o'clock this morning an earth tremor of unusual severity broke several plate-glass windows in Central Square and completely disorganized the electric and street railway systems. The tremor was felt in the outlying districts and the steeple of the First Baptist Church on Angell Hill (designed by Christopher Wren in 1717) was entirely demolished. Firemen are now attempting to put out a blaze which threatens to destroy the Partridgeville Glue Works. An investigation is promised by the mayor and an immediate attempt will be made to fix responsibility for this disastrous occurrence.

OCCULT WRITER MURDERED BY UNKNOWN GUEST

Horrible Crime in Central Square

Mystery Surrounds Death of Halpin Chalmers

At 9 a. m. today the body of Halpin Chalmers, author and journalist, was found in an empty room above the jewelry store of Smithwick and Isaacs, 24 Central Square. The coroner's investigation revealed that the room had been rented *furnished* to Mr. Chalmers on May 1, and that he had himself disposed of the furniture a fortnight ago. Chalmers was the author of several recondite books on occult themes, and a member of the Bibliographic Guild. He formerly resided in Brooklyn, New York.

At 7 a. m. Mr. L. E. Hancock, who occupies the apartment opposite Chalmers' room in the Smithwick and Isaacs establishment, smelt a peculiar odor when he opened his door to take in his cat and the morning edition of the *Partridgeville Gazette.* The odor he describes as extremely acrid and nauseous, and he affirms that it was so strong in the vicinity of Chalmers' room that he was obliged to hold his nose when he approached that section of the hall.

He was about to return to his own apartment when it occurred to him that Chalmers might have accidentally forgotten to turn off the gas in his kitchenette. Becoming considerably alarmed at the thought, he decided to investigate, and when repeated tappings on Chalmers' door brought no response he notified the superintendent. The latter opened the door by means of a pass key, and the two men quickly made their way into Chalmers' room. The room was utterly destitute of furniture, and Hancock asserts that when he first glanced at the floor his heart went cold within him, and that the superintendent, without saying a word, walked to the open window and stared at the building opposite for fully five minutes.

Chalmers lay stretched upon his back in the center of the room. He was starkly nude, and his chest and arms were covered with a peculiar bluish pus or ichor. His head lay grotesquely upon his chest. It had been completely severed from his body, and the features were twisted

and torn and horribly mangled. Nowhere was there a trace of blood.

The room presented a most astonishing appearance. The intersections of the walls, ceiling and floor had been thickly smeared with plaster of Paris, but at intervals fragments had cracked and fallen off, and someone had grouped these upon the floor about the murdered man so as to form a perfect triangle.

Beside the body were several sheets of charred yellow paper. These bore fantastic geometric designs and symbols and several hastily scrawled sentences. The sentences were almost illegible and so absurd in context that they furnished no possible clue to the perpetrator of the crime. "I am waiting and watching," Chalmers wrote. "I sit by the window and watch walls and ceiling. I do not believe they can reach me, but I must beware of the Doels. Perhaps *they* can help them break through. The satyrs will help, and they can advance through the scarlet circles. The Greeks knew a way of preventing that. It is a great pity that we have forgotten so much."

On another sheet of paper, the most badly charred of the seven or eight fragments found by Detective Sergeant Douglas (of the Partridgeville Reserve), was scrawled the following:

"Good God, the plaster is falling! A terrific shock has loosened the plaster and it is falling. An earthquake perhaps! I never could have anticipated this. It is growing dark in the room. I must phone Frank. But can he get here in time? I will try. I will recite the Einstein formula. I will—God, they are breaking through! They are breaking through! Smoke is pouring from the corners of the wall. Their *tongues*—ahhhhh——"

In the opinion of Detective Sergeant Douglas, Chalmers was poisoned by some obscure chemical. He has sent specimens of the strange blue slime found on Chalmers' body to the Partridgeville Chemical Laboratories; and he expects the report will shed new light on one of the most mysterious crimes of recent years. That Chalmers entertained a guest on the evening preceding the earthquake is certain, for his neighbor distinctly heard a low murmur of conversation in the former's room as he passed it on his way to the stairs. Suspicion points strongly to this unknown visitor and the police are diligently endeavoring to discover his identity.

4

REPORT of James Morton, chemist and bacteriologist:

My dear Mr. Douglas:

The fluid sent to me for analysis is the most peculiar that I have ever examined. It resembles living protoplasm, but it lacks the peculiar substances known as enzymes. Enzymes catalyze the chemical reactions occurring in living cells, and when the cell dies they cause it to disintegrate by hydrolyzation. Without enzymes protoplasm should possess enduring vitality, i. e., immortality. Enzymes are the negative components, so to speak, of unicellular organism, which is the basis of all life. That living matter can exist without enzymes biologists emphatically deny. And yet the substance that you have sent me is alive and it lacks these "indispensable" bodies. Good God, sir, do you realize what astounding new vistas this opens up?

5

EXCERPT from The Secret Watchers *by the late Halpin Chalmers:*

What if, parallel to the life we know, there is another life that does not die, which lacks the elements that destroy *our* life? Perhaps in another dimension there is a *different* force from that which generates our life. Perhaps this force emits energy, or something similar to energy, which

passes from the unknown dimension where *it* is and creates a new form of cell life in our dimension. No one knows that such new cell life does exist in our dimension. Ah, but I have seen *its* manifestations. I have *talked* with them. In my room at night I have talked with the Doels. And in dreams I have seen their maker. I have stood on the dim shore beyond time and matter and seen *it*. *It* moves through strange curves and outrageous angles. Some day I shall travel in time and meet *it* face to face.

Ballade of Wandering Ghosts

By HANNA BAIRD CAMPBELL

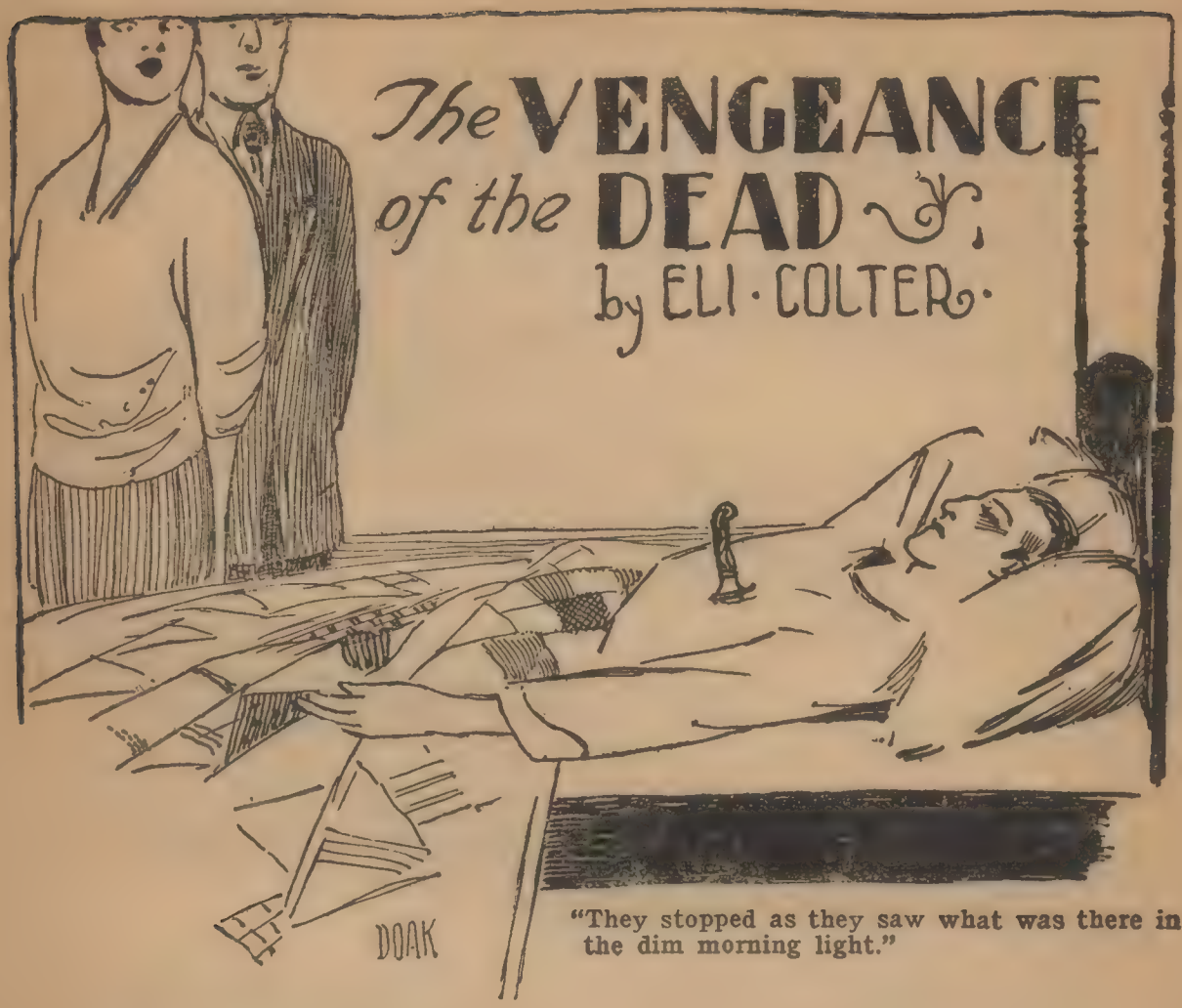
Have you heard the story the old wives tell,
  When winds in the turret sob and groan,
And the bloated moon casts an evil spell
  On the hearts of men when the day has flown?
When shadows out of the void are blown,
  And the reeling stars grow sick and pale,
When phantoms meet and their sins condone—
  Have you heard them whisper the evil tale?

They mumble and mouth of a loathsome dell,
  And a stagnant pool, with dead leaves strown,
Where vapors, foul with the stench of hell,
  Strike the chill of death through blood and bone;
And above the pool on a slimy stone,
  Wrapped in a luminous mist-gray veil,
Sits the ghost of the self-slain Angelone—
  Have you heard them whisper the evil tale?

They swear, at the stroke of the midnight bell,
  Betrayed by her lover, to rest unknown,
Her eery songs on the night-winds swell
  As she hushes her unborn babe's faint moan.
And the old wives clack in an undertone,
  And drown their fears in mugs of ale,
While Love looks down from a rotting throne—
  Have you heard them whisper the evil tale?

ENVOI

Ah, ravished heart, can man atone,
  Or prayers, or penance, or tears avail?
The ghastly harvest is reaped as sown—
  Have you heard them whisper the evil tale?



"They stopped as they saw what was there in the dim morning light."

The Story Thus Far

Jesse and his brother Dan invite a party of friends to their hunting-lodge, Waggener Wilds, in the wilderness. Among others in the party is Ben Tarrton, a handsome man, lionized by the ladies, but Dan for some reason takes a violent dislike to him; and so does Natchez, the caretaker of the lodge, whose expression is one of stark horror as he gazes at Tarrton. Natchez becoming suddenly ill the first night the party is at the lodge, Jesse gets into his car to go to town for a doctor. On the way he finds Natchez's collie-dog, dead, its throat torn open, and drained of its blood. A little farther on he meets Sneath, the hobo who had been helping Natchez at the lodge, and who had been a soldier in Tarrton's company overseas during the war. Sneath is frantic with terror, bawling out, "I seen Tarrton doin' it again, just like I seen him out in No Man's Land—only this time it was Natchez's collie."

4. The Monster

I WAS not half-way home, when Dan was awakened in his room abruptly. For a moment he lay still, wondering what had disturbed him. Then he became acutely aware of commotion outside, and he sat up, listening. He heard, then. It was the hounds, howling loudly. You must remember that he had, all along, at least a suspicion, though he had never fully grasped what a monstrous thing the reality would prove to be. Even what he suspected was ghastly enough. And the moment he heard the hounds howling, he had a faint idea of what he would find.

He leaped out of bed, and Boyce, in the next room, heard him. They called back and forth, and inside of five minutes the whole crowd was in

Dan's room in dressing-gowns and slippers, staring out at the dogs. By this time the police dogs and the setter had joined the hounds, and before Dan had time to wonder where the collie was, Jane Lee remarked that they were all in Dan's room but Ben. Only Ben was still asleep. Marian said nervously that she didn't see how he *could* sleep in such a racket.

The noise was hideous. Dan, more than any of them, was starkly aware of Ben's absence. And he was aware of something else. He felt the awful, pestilential presence brooding over the great, gloomy house. The dawn was just breaking in the sky, a horrible, raw, cold dawn, and the group stood huddled there by the window frightened stiff by the diabolical nameless fear that crowded upon them. Gladstone, desperate for action, wanted to know why Natchez didn't shut the dogs up, and asked where I was. Dan told him Natchez was sick and I had gone for a doctor, and that Chin was too much afraid of the dogs to try to order them about. Lee, terrorized into sobriety, begged Dan to go and see if Ben was all right.

Dan was reluctant to make a move toward that silent room of Ben's, but the whole crowd added their pleas to Lee's and he gave in. He hurried across the hall, not stopping for the formality of a rap on Ben's door. He was too sure of what he'd find. Like terrorized sheep the others crowded after him. But they all stopped short and huddled together again as Dan threw open the door, and they saw what was there in the dim morning light.

Ben had been murdered in his bed. He lay flat on his back, one hand under his head, the other lying loosely across his stomach. But for the telltale waxen pallor of his skin he might have been asleep. A knife, with a large handle of unusual design, was buried to the hilt in his left breast. Not a drop of blood had escaped, since the knife had not been removed. Boyce gasped out something about the knife. Dan told him it was one that had belonged to our father, that it had hung downstairs in his old room. The next instant Dan had a bunch of shaken men and hysterical women on his hands.

He herded them out of the room and downstairs to the living-room, where he built a fire in the fireplace. They were so stunned and stricken that they obeyed him docilely. The women were crying and the men were trying to quiet them, and Dan was having a nasty few moments of it. As he rose from getting a fire blazing, he heard the Hammerton roar up and stop. He rushed to the window and saw me leap out of the car and turn the hose on the dogs. The excited brutes fought the icy water savagely, but they stopped their unearthly howling. I locked them in the garage and dashed up to see Natchez. He had come to, by that time, was quite conscious, but a little weak, and he had been on the point of coming down to quiet the dogs when he heard me arrive.

I asked him what had been the matter with him, and he looked at me queerly, saying that his heart was none too good. I left Chin Hoy still taking care of him, and raced for the house.

Dan met me in the hall, his face white and set, and I saw the huddled, terror-ridden group behind him. "What's the matter?" I asked, wondering what else could have happened to add to the already unendurable horror in which I was striving to retain my mental equilibrium.

"Go up and look in Tarrton's room," Dan answered tersely, and Nan Boyce gave a smothered scream.

I ran upstairs, three steps at a time, but I already had some idea of what I would find. Oddly enough, it steadied my reeling brain. You may think that queer. But out of a night of hideous fantasy and unnamable

madness, plain human murder was something tangible and understandable, something I could get hold of. If you'll believe it, I walked out of that room of death and back down the stairs more nearly my cool normal self than I had been since Dan had come north. When I entered the living-room, and the rest of them turned to stare at me fearfully, my evident calmness had a quieting effect on them that nothing else could have done. I saw it, and lost no time in following up that one grim advantage in that house of horror.

"Does anyone know anything about this?" I asked quietly, as I laid aside my topcoat and gloves.

"No." Dan shook his head, answering for the rest. "The dogs woke us, and we went in and found him like that."

"I see," I said, probably because I could think of nothing else to say. I was thinking rapidly enough, trying to decide upon which was the wiser thing to do next, when Natchez came in the front door and paused in the hall, beckoning to me. I excused myself from my guests for a moment and went to see what he wanted.

"Has something happened, Mr. Waggener?" he asked quietly, and to my astonishment the man was quite himself again. I remarked on it. "Heart attacks like mine don't leave much trace after they're over," he said, and asked again if something had happened. I told him Ben had been murdered in his sleep, and asked him where Chin was. He merely nodded at hearing of that grisly death upstairs, and said he knew from the howling of the dogs that death was around somewhere, then informed me that he had ordered Chin Hoy to stay in the garage till some of us should call him. "Was that right?" he finished.

I told him I approved of it, and requested him to come into the living-room with me, thinking I might be able to use him. He followed, his face expressionless, and took his place leaning up against one corner of the fireplace mantel a little way from Dan, as I again faced my guests. I really was grateful for the harshness of fact, sad as it made me to know that Ben was dead. Delving into a murder would take my mind off the hideous chimeras that had been harassing me. I was determined to do what I could myself, before calling in an officer. With that in view, as the most logical beginning, I turned to my brother.

"You locked up, Dan?"

"I certainly did." He looked me squarely in the eye. "Every door, and shot every bolt from garret to cellar, as you requested."

I shrank at what that meant, but there was nothing for it except the truth. I felt the harshness of my own tones as I spoke, to them all, collectively: "You will realize that, in that case, the house could not have been entered. As a matter of fact, it could not even have been approached. The dogs would have driven off any intruder."

Rick Boyce started, stared at me, and demanded belligerently, "What are you hinting at, Jesse?"

"I'm not hinting, Rick," I answered, giving him back his look. "I'm merely stating an obvious fact. All of you noted the bars on the windows. With the doors securely bolted and locked, this house is as impregnable as an armed fort. Therefore, the person who killed Ben Tarrton was *in* the house when the doors were locked. That fact is unassailable."

"But, good heavens, man," Lee burst out indignantly, "you aren't accusing——"

"I'm accusing no one of anything," I interrupted tersely. "I'm merely stating the fact that no person could have entered this house save those of you who are now here! And somebody killed Ben Tarrton since 11 o'clock last night."

A scream answered me, a scream that was barely audible, the mere exudation of an exhausted breath, and Jane Lee threw herself into her husband's arms.

"Let's keep as cool as we can, please." I swept my gaze over the entire group. Only Dan and Natchez were cool and self-possessed. Dan was rather white and his eyes had a queer light in them, but Natchez was almost bored. It was none of Natchez's affair, anyhow, and I couldn't expect Dan to get excited over the death of a man he had disliked from the moment he first saw him. I felt sorriest, I think, for Marian Gladstone. She sat like a person stunned, cowed into a state bordering on vacuity. Action was the thing that would be good for her, I knew, and with that in mind I spoke to her. "Marian, I think a good hot cup of coffee would benefit us, and I don't want Chin brought in yet. Would you make us a pot of coffee?"

She rose with a flash of eager assent in her eyes, and I gestured toward the kitchen. "You'll find kindling in a box by the stove," I told her, "and small wood in a box on the stoop, just outside the side kitchen door."

She nodded and hurried from the room. I turned my attention back to the task before me.

"Of course, most of you know nothing about this affair, anyway," I began. "But one of you *must* know precisely *all* about it. That one will save the rest of us a great deal of unpleasantness if he will come out with it like a gentleman."

"You're going rather far," Boyce interrupted, angrily.

"I'll not forget that I am your host," I answered. "I simply want to have this business over as quickly as possible. I see no need for the inquisition of extensive questioning. Anyone could have driven that knife. Its own weight would have been enough for the death blow. We must face the facts. Ben lies dead in an impregnable house into which a party of people have been locked. Yet all of us here were his closest friends. We——"

"See here, Jesse." Rick Boyce got to his feet and faced me abruptly. "Before we go any further with this thing let's get down to cases. It's utterly ridiculous to accuse any of us of having done away with Ben. Why, he was one of the best friends I ever had — one of the finest chaps I've ever known. I'm certain the rest of us here held him always in high esteem."

"You bet we did," Gladstone affirmed quickly, wiping his glasses with shaking fingers.

"All of us," Lee said, his comedy sunk in sober grief, and he looked at me over the head of his wife, burrowed into his breast. "Nobody could have really hated Ben. It's utterly ridiculous, just as Rick says, even to intimate that any of us could have—could have——" He stammered, and Boyce picked up the sentence smoothly.

"Could have done such a thing. And it's just as ridiculous to try to locate the murderer before we do a little calculating. No, no, Jesse. Your deduction is absurd. Somebody must have gotten in, somehow."

"Nobody *could* have gotten in," I retorted. I was becoming more and more myself with every moment. Facing logical reasoning had brought me up sharply, chased the terrors out of my brain and planted my feet firmly in a solid everyday environment. Already the horrors of the past night were faded into so dim a piece of fantasy that I could laugh at them, and at the whole chain of incidents which had caused them, culminating in that poor fool of a raving drunkard. I sighed in positive relief, straightened my shoulders, and went on briskly. "What kind of calculating do you wish to assume, Rick?"

"Well, first, where the devil did that knife come from?" Rick returned.

"I'll show you," I answered, not knowing then that Dan had already told him. I crossed to Father's old room, slipped my hand in my pocket for the key, and started, to find it absent and not with the other keys on my ring. Then I remembered, and turned to my brother. "Oh, I've not got the key. I gave it to you last night, Dan. May I have it, please."

He took the key from his pocket and extended it toward me. I accepted it and unlocked the door. The guests crowded behind me as I threw back the door and entered the room. Silently I gestured to the place where the knife had hung. Set into the opposite wall was a high, polished board. Into the board seven spikes were driven, and on six of the protruding spikes hung knives of diminishing size but identical in construction with the knife buried in Tarrton's chest. The seventh spike was empty, the spike that had held the biggest knife. I motioned toward it.

"That's where the knife hung. My father was an expert knife-thrower—it was a hobby of his. He had them hung up there that way to prevent their falling from an insecure peg of any kind. They are dangerous playthings."

"But, listen, Jesse!" Boyce was talking again. "None of us has been in this room as yet. We'd never even looked inside of it. And the door was locked and you had the key. Why, think, man! Whoever killed Ben knew, he had to know, of the existence of those knives. And that lets every darned one of us out!"

I started. God save me for a fool, but I had not till that moment even considered suspicion pointing at Dan. But I saw it now. We all saw it at once. I saw a look dart from eye to eye. I felt a thought dart from brain to brain. Dan knew of the knives. Dan had had my key when the thing was done. I realized that my face was slowly whitening, as I waved them all out of the room and locked that door behind me. I followed them dumbly into the living-room and they congregated in a hushed, appalled group, drawn aside from Dan. He stood leaning up against the fireplace again, looking them over with faint cynical amusement. Natchez was staring at him with startled eyes. I had lost my power of speech, and the hideous silence that had fallen upon us was rasping my nerves.

"Surely," Boyce spoke quietly, almost gently, striving to help me get a grip on myself, "you can see what I say is logical, Jesse. Isn't it perfectly obvious?"

"Y-yes," I admitted dumbly. "Of course. It had to be someone who—who knew of the knives. And—there—there is no other key. But—by God, that's infamous! It can't be possible!" They all knew what I meant.

Dan smiled faintly. "I didn't do it," he said, taking the bull by the horns with a flatness that made me gasp. He turned to Boyce. "The supposition isn't infamous, as Jesse says; it's only silly. If you have any observant senses at all, Rick, you must have seen that I was as astounded at finding Tarrton like that as any of you were." Which was true. He hadn't expected to find Ben *dead*. He finished sarcastically, "I should call it the intelligent thing to search for evidence of some kind before the deed is hung on the most likely person handy. And there are such things as finger prints, you know."

"Don't get nasty, Dan," I put in, hastily, seeing the indignant expression that flashed into Rick's face, "we'll leave the finger prints to the experts. I'm going up to Ben's room and see whether or not there is any evidence, any clue that can help us. Natchez, since you and I were the only ones locked out of the house, I shall ask you to come with me."

NATCHEZ followed me up to Ben's room, with a queer backward glance at Dan. But we found nothing. I stood around rather helplessly, I fear, not paying much attention to Natchez and his businesslike examination of the room. My mind was stricken with a new horror. My kid brother Dan! Caught in a net of circumstantial evidence! I knew well enough it *was* circumstantial, that Dan had never killed Ben. But what would that avail, with the circumstances as they were?

He had been in Mexico for six years. He was a stranger to most of the party. Boyce, the Gladstones and I had all heard him say he did not like Ben, and he had certainly acted queerly about that, too. The house was locked. No one could have got in. He was the only one in the house who knew of the knives, and he had had my key in his pocket.

I felt sick at the pit of my stomach as I followed Natchez back to the living-room. Rick asked eagerly if we had found anything.

"No," I said dully. "No clue." I did not even glance at Natchez. If he had found anything he would have told me. I looked at the crowd of friends, those who had long been my friends, but I viewed them now with hostile eyes. A horrible suspicion was growing into a cloud over them, looming and menacing. They were, one and all, already convinced that my brother was the murderer in their midst. But I saw they shrank from facing me squarely. They waited for me to end the silence, flashing covert glances at each other, fidgeting uneasily, while Dan surveyed them collectively with a cool, ironic, half-amused gaze. I couldn't endure it longer.

"Well, somebody did it!" I burst out, hotly. "And there's always something to tell the tale. If the guilty person is not willing to come clean, I must do the next best thing and send for the sheriff."

Marian cried out sharply. She had just come back from the kitchen. I only nodded at her. The sheriff would find the guilty one, fast enough, I told myself desperately. That was the one way to extricate Dan. The sheriff must be brought. I turned straining eyes on Dan. His face had become grim, and there was an ugly glare in his deep-set black eyes.

"Oh, Benny! Benny!" Nan Boyce cried suddenly, in the hysteria of grief.

Dan flared, like a man at the end of his patience. "Your little tin god's dead," he rasped. "Stop grieving over the rotter. I'm here to tell you that to any man who killed Ben Tarr- ton society owes a vote of thanks."

A gasp of horror rose from over the room. I'm not sure that it was not harshest and quickest from me. Dan faced down our incredulous stare with flaming eyes.

"How can you judge what he must have done to someone, to have brought that on himself? If he never did another thing but what he did to me, he deserved killing as richly as any convict in a death cell waiting the rope."

"Dan! Dan!" I interrupted him, terrified at the thing he was doing to himself. It looked black enough for him already. "You said you never saw him before!"

"And I never did," Dan corroborated. I couldn't stop him. He was insane with fury, roused to a pitch of insane anger over the rising of some old ghost, shaken with a rage that had been born years ago and had never died, the worst rage a man can know. His words came crackling from his sneering mouth. "But I've crossed his trail before. The man was a hellion—with the women. How do I know? Because he took the girl I was to have married, seven years ago. She died. Don't ask me how—it's too horrible to repeat. Through him she died. I'd have killed him right then if I could have got my hands on him.

But he was out of harm's way, overseas. After I buried her, I guess I was crazy for a while.

"I wanted to get out of the United States. I didn't want to murder anybody. But I knew I didn't dare stay in the States after he came back. I went to Mexico. You thought it was because I was peeved that I didn't get overseas. Hell! It was because I didn't want to commit murder! And I pitched into work like a fool to keep it out of my mind. If I'd known he was to be one of this party I'd never have come north. When I did come, and found him with your crowd, it was all I could do to endure it. I didn't kill him, but I'm glad he's dead."

"Dan!" I cried, into the torrent of words, and gripped his arm. He turned his ghastly face and blazing eyes on me.

"Sorry if I've made an ass of myself," he said curtly. "But it's true, and I don't take a word of it back. You people are grieving over a skunk —over a hell-monster of the worst kind. You'd be sick to death if you knew what a fiend he was. Give it out that he committed suicide. For God's sake, don't sick the sheriff on the human benefactor that knifed that devil in a saint's body."

A numb silence fell over the room. I was cold to the heart. Couldn't Dan see that after such an outburst as that, not a person in the room could be made to believe he hadn't killed Ben? But I had only one thing to do. My reeling brain held tenaciously to one thin thread of hope—the sheriff would find the murderer, there *was* always something to tell the tale. I dropped my hand from Dan's arm and turned to Natchez.

"Natchez, take the Hammerton—and go for the sheriff."

Natchez nodded, and crossed the room toward the hall, almost shambling, like a man stricken. I saw his eyes cling to Dan's face, and then Dan, aware that the caretaker was staring at him, swung round his head and looked after him. Natchez jerked his thumb in a slight beckoning gesture. Then he was gone. Dan looked swiftly around the room, to see whether or not the guests had observed that little byplay, but all of them were meticulously avoiding looking that way. My brother whirled silently, stepped into the hall as noiselessly as a cat, and followed Natchez.

My brain was whirling. What could that possibly mean? Had Natchez found something in the room upstairs after all, something he had kept from me? What could he want of Dan? I stared at my guests. They were meticulously avoiding my gaze. In that moment I hated them. They had condemned Dan. I flared at them, harshly:

"Kindly stay where you are till I return. I want to speak to Dan."

None of them answered, but they looked at me with open pity as I wheeled and hurried from the room. Off to the side, out of view from the living-room, I saw Dan and Natchez just passing into the garage. I was determined to know what went on between them. I broke into a light run, circled the garage, and came up to it on the opposite side. Dan and Natchez would not go upstairs, I knew. They wouldn't want Chin Hoy to hear what they said. They would stay down where the cars were.

I was correct in my calculations. I slipped up to the small side window and peered through the pane. Dan and Natchez had come to a halt by the Hammerton, and Natchez was speaking.

"Dan—just what will the sheriff do when he gets here?"

"Why, the usual thing, Natchez," Dan answered. He lit a cigarette, raised one foot to the running-board and leaned comfortably on the foredoor. His rage had subsided, now. Only a somber gleam smoldered in the black depths. I could see and hear them both quite plainly. Dan went

on to explain: "He'll question everybody, search the house and the people, examine Tarrton's room for a clue, and all that sort of thing. He might find something you and Jesse overlooked. Things to which the layman would attach no importance might be of inestimable value to the sheriff. In sparsely settled country like this the sheriff is the whole works, you know—police force, detective agency and everything else. And a lot of those fellows are pretty keen."

"Yes." Natchez nodded, his grouchy face dark and his eyes harried. "Have you thought of your position, Dan?"

"It's not so menacing as Jesse thinks." And Dan smiled. "As Jesse said, there is always something to tell the tale. Finger prints, maybe nothing but a hair or a thread from a garment. But always something. And then, if he doesn't find anything in the way of a clue, there is always the third degree. Oh, he'll find the guilty one, Natchez. Under adequate pressure, the murderer will break."

"But—suppose no one breaks!" Natchez moved close, and his eyes were like phosphorus. "Suppose everyone in that party *is* innocent. Suppose there is not the least clue—no finger prints—nothing. Then what?"

Dan stared at him. "What are you getting at, Natchez? If such a condition could exist, my neck wouldn't be worth a last year's rent receipt, of course. But it can't exist!"

"It does exist," Natchez said shortly. "But your neck has got to be saved some way. God knows how it can be done."

Dan's face whitened, and he gripped Natchez by the arm, convulsively. "How can it exist? What do you mean? How do you know?"

"I know who killed Ben Tarrton," Natchez answered.

"What!" Dan stood like a man frozen, then he slowly took out his cigarette case and tried to light a cigarette with his shaking fingers. "You *know?*"

"I certainly do."

Dan's hand, in the act of lighting the cigarette that quivered in his hold, stopped short, and I could see the reflection of the flame in his wild eyes. "Well, for God's sake, who? Out with it, man!"

"The dead." Natchez bowed his head, with a strange reverence. "The dead killed him. Not one, but a hundred. All those dead whom he tortured to the last gasp." Natchez's face was suddenly ghastly, and his voice sank lower. "You know what he was, don't you? You know that—he was"—lower and lower dropped the hideous gasp, as Natchez looked back on some unspeakable horror he could not forget—"he was—a——"

But I could not get that last word. I strained my ears for the slightest sound. Natchez did not say it again.

"God!" Dan cried. "Holy God! Not that!"

5. *The Vengeance of the Dead*

"YES!" Natchez cried vehemently. "He was! And you're in a net so tight that only the power of God can help you. But He will stand by, Dan. I tell you He will. And so will I. I'll get you out of this if it takes *my* life!"

"You! Why?" Dan's dark face was filled with wonder.

And then again I saw the miracle of Natchez's dour and sour countenance refined and softened into a splendid humanity. "Because," he said in a strangely vibrant tone of gratitude, "you are Borden Waggener come alive again, and Borden Waggener was the only man who would ever believe me. I told him what had shaken me from my moorings, almost driven me from sanity, and he believed."

"It was—Tarrton?" Dan asked swiftly.

"Yes." Natchez's face flamed with

righteous hatred and anger. "It was that hell-hound they called Tarrton. When the war broke out I enlisted and was sent across. I wasn't so young, but I was a good cook and they made me a mess sergeant. My wife and daughter followed me. I never knew how they managed it, but they did. I had been sent to the trenches, and what with the tangle of the mail and the rigidity of the censorship, I didn't know they were there. Then I got messed up, was sent to the hospital and invalided home.

"Not till then did I find out that my wife and daughter had followed me. My wife died over there of the flu, but my daughter came back here. Over there she had met a captain and fallen in love with him. He had finally been sent back to the front, she had met him on leave, and she came home to see me, having discovered that I was wounded and sent to the States. She was puzzled and frightened by things she did not understand, and she was afraid at first to tell me. Her very fear drove her to detailing the whole thing, though.

"She said that when she was with this fellow she was always so happy and well. He was a man the women fancied a great deal. And she gave me his name, and described him, with his white skin and dark eyes and red hair. But when he went away from her she always felt such a strange depletion of her strength. I knew something terrible had happened to her. She was as white and bloodless as though the red fluid had been drawn from her veins. I began to suspect right then what he was, especially when she spoke of his big white teeth. They were so large, she said, for a man's teeth, and so terribly powerful. He could lift the weight of his huge body by his teeth.

"I felt that the only way to raise any protection about her was to make myself capable of leaving my body in sleep. I watched her at night, when she was asleep and didn't know, but I couldn't see him come. I went to a professor of mysticism and studied like a fiend. I got so that I could get out of my body by willing myself out. Then I watched her again—out of the body, you understand. As long as I was in the flesh I couldn't see him, and I couldn't stop him. But when I was out I saw him fast enough. He came in the window, and started toward her bed, but I leaped between them. I grappled with him, to find that he was much stronger than I. I had no chance with him. He threw me aside as though I were a stick, rushed to the bed and leaned over her—and as I watched he changed to a monstrous cat. The next instant his face was against hers, and he was sucking the breath from her mouth with his. I heard her horrible gasping struggles, but I was powerless. I moaned and shrieked at him, leaping on his back and beating at him. He drew the life out of her till he had his fill, in spite of my puny assault, changed back to the form of a man, and went away again as he had come, laughing as he slipped through the window.

"I got back in my body and struggled to bring her back to consciousness. She was appallingly weak. I began to be afraid that she was gone. But by morning she had recovered enough to open her eyes, to dress and trail languidly about the house. Frantic with fear for her, I rushed to my professor of mysticism. And he explained to me exactly the kind of monster I had to deal with. He was not a vampire, he wasn't a werewolf, he wasn't any commonly understood type of monstrosity. He was a combination of them all, and something else besides. This was the explanation of his activities, Dan, as the professor outlined them to me.

"He came to this planet when the powers threw him off one of the dark stars. As far as the professor could judge, that was somewhere around a thousand years ago."

"What! Is he that old?" Dan exclaimed.

"That old anyway, yes. He's had two or three existences. In one he was a werewolf. In one he was a vampire. In one he was a soul-stealer. In this last existence he was all combined. He kept abreast of the times as the world advanced, living first on one part of the globe, then on another. He presented to society the appearance of a wealthy man of the world, and no one ever suspected what he was. He was too smooth, too sly. But to keep his body and spirit replenished he continually was forced to gorge himself on warm blood, and to breathe into his throat the souls of women.

"For that reason he was always on hand when any country went to war. He assumed the dress and language of the country, and through his unholy black magic got himself into some not too prominent position—where he could reach the battlefield. When a battle was over and the field was strewn with the dead and dying, he changed to a wolf, slunk among the corpses and wounded and drank enough of blood to keep his youth intact for another decade. He could always find a war, you realize. If too long a stretch occurred between wars, he resorted to his werewolf form and went into the wild country where he could tear open the throat of some animal.

"Oh, he was hideously sly and clever! Always his tracks were covered so that not even any strange gossip could rise and follow him wherever he wanted to go. And that monstrous loathsome ghoul was breathing the soul from my daughter's body to replenish his ghastly spirit! I begged the professor in terror to tell me what I could do. I asked him why in God's name the monster hadn't been annihilated before. He told me sadly that only a few of the initiate such as he knew Tarrton for what he was. There was only one way in which he could be forever laid low, only one way in which he could be killed, body, brain and bestial spirit."

"And that?" Dan breathed, so low I could but faintly hear him.

"While he was out of the body, away where he could not protect it, some other man must accomplish the thing. The avenger must pass out of his own body, and must be possessed of the power to move material things while in that form. He must take a heavy knife, a long one with a blade that would sink into the heart. He must carry that knife to the monster's sleeping empty body. In one hand he must carry a mixture of the ashes of one victim the monster had slain and the blood of another, stirred into a paste. A hole must be drilled into the point of the knife and packed with that paste. Then the avenger must call around him the disembodied souls of all the victims the monster had claimed. Those souls must mass around him in a mighty impassable group while he drove the knife deep into the heart of the sleeping monster-body. And as the knife sank in they must with one accord chant the incantation which would blast his hellish spirit.

"I did not know how I could ever accomplish such a hideous thing, a thing that others had tried to do, and that he had always easily foiled, for always they lacked some one thing that was vital to the accomplishing of the deed. But I would have moved heaven and earth to save my daughter. I rushed back—only to find her gone. He had, by subtle mental suggestion, urged her to flee from me, raging at the thought that I wanted to cheat him of her life. I think I went insane for a while. But after a few horrible days I grew calmer, then set out to follow her. I traced her slowly, by devious means, to find that he had beaten me after all. She had died in a charity hospital and some kind-hearted person had buried her.

"FROM then on I had but one motive in living. It was to blast him forever. I studied and practised magic night and day, but my mind had been so heavily taxed that it gave way under the strain, and all my power fell from me. Hopeless, I decided to commit suicide, to go on from this life and find her where she might be. It was then your father stopped me, and listened to my story, and believed me, and sent me up here to gain strength and sanity again. He used to come up here and work with me. I grew strong and level-minded before he died. I went back to my magic. Then I discovered that the very fiend I planned to kill was now a friend of your brother's. I doubled my efforts.

"I got so I could leave my body and move material things. Out of the body, I went to my fair daughter's grave and brought back a small bit of her ashes. Then Jesse wrote me they were coming up here for this outing. God had delivered the fiend into my hands. I knew it had been some time since he had been able to get his fill of blood. The instant I laid eyes on him I saw that he was losing his strength a little. I knew he would claim a victim that night the moment he could get out of the body. I had already taken that largest knife and drilled a hole in the point. But I had placed it back on the spike so that its absence might not cause any comment from you or Jesse.

"As soon as I saw the lights upstairs in the lodge, I knew he had gone to his room and would be quickly at his activities. I immediately repaired to my room and left my body. I went out into the yard and watched. Chin Hoy, seeing the state of my body, thought I was sick and called Jesse, but I dared not delay. The monster had already come from the lodge and started toward the garage. I had to follow him. He had already taken on his wolf form. He made a ravenous attack on my dogs. The four dogs that were not chained fled in terror. I do not think they could see him clearly, but they sensed and feared him. That only delighted his hellish soul, and he leaped after the collie and raced to the kill.

"The collie fled madly down the road. Chin was then in the house, where he had gone to get Jesse. I raced, too, after the fiend. Nearly a half-mile down the road he caught the collie, and leaped to his kill, to tear open the dog's throat. He was so ravenously thirsty for his ghoulish drink that he did not notice me. I went so close that I reached a hand down under the furry body and caught two or three drops of blood that slobbered from his wolf jaws. That was all I wanted.

"Wild with fury, I ran back to the garage, and passed Jesse tearing to town for the doctor. I went to the hiding-place I had made in the garage and brought forth the sacred ashes of my daughter, and of them and the blood of my noble collie I made the magic paste, saying over it the incantation the professor had taught me. Carrying the precious paste carefully, I hurried into the lodge. Locked doors were nothing to me. I walked right through the door into your father's room, took down the knife and packed the paste into the hole in its blade. Then I passed through the door into the hall. The knife, in my hands, was as capable of passing through wooden panels as I.

"I leaped up the stairs, calling with all my might on the souls of all his ravaged victims. I was shaken by the response that answered me. By the hundreds they came, out of all the centuries he had blasphemed with his presence; women from whom he had drawn the souls, men from whom he had drained blood on the battlefield, animals of every species from whom he had torn the life and of whom he had emptied the veins. They knew what I wanted of them. With a holy cry of vengeance, the vengeance of

the dead, they massed around me as I hurtled into his room.

"There that hellishly beautiful body lay, asleep, while back down the road the werewolf crouched and gorged himself. I called on all the powers of heaven as I raised high the big knife, and the souls of the dead chanted their mighty incantation. Slowly I lowered the knife, and slowly I drove the blade home. The fiend felt that avenging steel the moment the point touched his flesh. He knew he was in danger of his hellish existence. He screamed and tried to get back. But in vain! The knife reached his heart, and before our eyes—the eyes of the dead and me—his monstrous spirit was blasted into a million fragments and whirled into the pit of oblivion forever.

"And then—I saw a marvelous sight. Those weary and ravaged dead began to glow with golden light. Their haunted eyes became blessed with peace. One by one they blessed me as they passed me, singing, and even the beasts he had ravaged frisked at my heels and licked my hands as they went on. One of the last to go was my fair daughter. She leaned to press a kiss on my cheek, but I could not bear to see her go. I walked with her for a long way before I finally bade her a temporary farewell and returned to my body.

"Chin Hoy was still there, and Jesse had returned. I knew a hue and cry would be raised when the monster's body was found, and the howling of the dogs had already apprised you of his death. But I had thought that, finding no guilty person in the house, the verdict would be death at the hands of a person unknown. I had not reckoned with the hideous net of circumstantial evidence that had closed around you. You were the only man who slept alone. The other men have their wives with them and therefore possess a perfect alibi. I am terrorized, Dan. I could tell my story, but they would laugh me out of court. You must not be sacrificed! But what can we do?"

"God! I don't know!" Dan's face was ghastly. "We're together, you and I, Natchez. Your daughter—she and I quarreled over a silly thing. I met her after you went overseas. When we quarreled, she and her mother followed you. Then she came back—and when *he,* that hellion, drove her from you, she fled to me, and I saw her die before my eyes. It was I who buried her, just before I went to Mexico."

"You—Dan!" Natchez cried. "You—and my daughter!"

"Yes." Dan's white face quivered. "I knew there was something horrible back of it, the way she died. I studied those things, too. I learned who and what he was, and how he could be conquered. But I could never gain even the first rudimentary ability in magic. I was powerless. I didn't want to live, but I had to, so I made the best of it. If I have to die because that fiend died, if they hang me on circumstantial evidence, I think I shall be glad to go on with her."

"No!" Natchez cried. "No! You shall not be his last victim! He shall not claim another, even by roundabout means. God listens, Dan. Pray! You and I together—pray!"

6. The Loyalty of the Living

I TURNED away from the window, then. Dan must be saved! And it was I who had to do it. I, as the tool of the divine power who would not let his innocent children suffer overlong. We were here, all of us, at this lodge, in an ordinary world, with an ordinary murder to face. The unbelieving world, that would laugh at Natchez's story as the raving of a madman, must have some commonplace explanation of the thing that had happened, of the death that had occurred. And suddenly, like a sequence unrolled on a silver sheet before my eyes, I saw the way.

I whirled and raced down the road to a spot I remembered, stooped and picked up something from the brush and slipped it into my pocket. Then I circled the house, keeping out of sight of those within the living-room. At the rear of the house I entered it noiselessly by the side kitchen door, which was unlocked by Marian when she went into the kitchen to make the coffee. I crossed the kitchen and descended the stairs into the cellar. There I hurried to the outer door, threw back the heavy bolts, unlocked it, opened the door and passed out, leaving it wide behind me.

Then I went back around the house and up the front steps. The guests heard me cross the veranda and enter the hall, and they crowded to the door as I came into the living-room. Their anxiety and concern clogged their tongues. I spoke quickly, to forestall their questions.

"I want to ask you to wait till I run up to Ben's room again. When I come down I hope to present to you a chain of evidence that will be unbreakable."

They nodded, as one, waiting dumbly to know what I might have to say. I hurried on up the stairs. That business of looking in his room again was all bluff, but it was part of the swift plan that had formed in my head. I walked into his bed chamber, disarranged the bed clothes a trifle, stood looking down for a moment upon the beautiful foul dead face, then went back down the stairs. The guests watched me in an agony of suspense as I stepped to the front door to call Natchez. He thrust his head out of the garage to see what I wanted, and I told him to come immediately, and to bring Dan and Chin Hoy. Before we others had gathered again in the living-room, I heard those three come running across the yard and up the steps. Then the next thing they were all crowded excitedly around me, seeing in my face that I had something startling to tell.

"Did you find anything, Jesse?" Rick Boyce burst out. "For God's sake, don't keep us in suspense."

"Yes," I said. "I understand. But I want you all to settle down quietly and listen to me. I think a good drink would brace us all up."

"Oh!" Marian cried. "I forgot all about the coffee."

"Coffee!" I smiled. "It's hardly what we want now, anyway, Marian. Chin Hoy, go down in the cellar and get a bottle of Scotch for the men and one of Benedictine for the ladies. Can't you all just take it easy, please?"

They stared at me, and Dan and Natchez, close together, hung on my words. They did not know I had been near the garage.

"Follow me closely, and you will see that it is so simple you will wonder why we did not trace it all out before. When Natchez and I were up before we did not look on the bed—we did not want to disturb the body. But I looked just now, and——"

I paused abruptly as I heard Chin Hoy come scurrying up the basement stairs. He raced across the kitchen and burst into the room to confront us with a frightened face, a bottle in each hand.

"Basement door, Missa Wegeneh. Wide open. Bolts up. Must be open all night, no?"

"What?" cried Dan, explosively. A chorus of excited cries came from the room about me and I raised a hand, asking for silence.

"That's the last link," I said steadily. Then swiftly I wove my web, the web that was to save Dan. "You will remember the hobo, Sneath. He had no trouble approaching the house; you recollect he had made friends with the dogs. When he left here he must have sneaked back and hidden himself in the basement before the doors were locked. There are plenty of places there where he could hide. His motive we know, from what Ben himself said: cheap revenge for

fancied imposition. He had been here helping Natchez clean house, so he knew of the knives. I saw him have a bunch of pass keys, so he would have had little trouble when he went to unlock the door. He helped Natchez put away the luggage, so he had Ben's room located. When you had all gone to bed, he slipped quietly up from the basement, entered Father's old room, got the knife and slipped upstairs, knifed Ben, stole back again and went out through the basement.

"But this—this is the thing that makes the chain complete. I found it just a moment ago, in the bedclothes by Ben's arm. It evidently dropped as Sneath leaned over in the dark."

I thrust my hand into my pocket, drew forth the thing my fingers touched, and held up for their inspection a small piece of bright green silk studded with yellow polka dots, made into a bow and fastened on little celluloid nibs.

"By God!" Lee cried, staring. "The hobo's trick tie!"

Instantly the room was in an uproar as they crowded around me, laughing half hysterically in their relief, slapping me on the back and congratulating everybody that the mystery was solved. Only Natchez and Dan stood stock-still, staring at me with shocked eyes. They thought I believed it too, you know. I had to stop either of them from saying anything to spoil what I had done.

"Into the kitchen with you, everybody," I demanded, "for a much-needed bracer. Chin Hoy, run along and open those bottles."

With the effervescent spirit of relief surging through them, the guests followed the Chinese into the kitchen. The caretaker and my brother did not move. When the last guest had gone, Dan took a step toward me.

"Jesse!" he said hoarsely. "Don't you realize that you've built such a chain of evidence around that Sneath that any court in the land would hang him?"

"Certainly," I answered steadily. "The evidence is absolutely indefeasible."

"But," Dan gasped, "you can't! You can't hang an innocent man!"

"Listen to me!" I cut him short. I looked him steadily in the eye, measuring the ground step by step.

How much must I tell? Must I tell that, as I got out of my car that morning to silence the dogs, I had seen Sneath's little green tie in the car seat and tossed it out into the brush by the road? No, not that. Must I tell that I knew Sneath had killed Willotson, knew it by his own admission, since I now realized that all Sneath had said was true? No, not that, either. Only one part of the grim truth did I need to tell.

"Listen, Dan. They would hang Sneath on that evidence, if they could, and rightly, for he was a murderer. But they can't hang him. He is already dead. As I came back from town this morning I saw his body lying doubled up by the railroad track. A wild beast, or something, had torn his throat open, but had been frightened away before it could work any further horrors upon him. I placed his body in the tool house, intending to send an undertaker for it. Now—I shall send the sheriff."

Dan turned his white face and awed eyes upon Natchez. For a moment they held each other's gaze in a wordless communication that I understood, though they did not know that.

"His last victim," Dan muttered. "But even Sneath is free, now."

"What?" I said, pretending not to have heard clearly.

"Nothing." Dan straightened, threw an arm about Natchez's shoulders and one about mine. "Let's go get a drink. Then Natchez and I will drive for the sheriff."

[THE END]

"So we found Tony! His eyes—awful contrast to his grinning mouth—mirrored a terror too profound for any words to convey."

"VERY well, Mr. Drewe! I'll sign the agreement, though no one but you would drive such a devil's bargain."

The speaker's tall, emaciated body vibrated with indignation, and his strange light eyes blazed like incandescent lamps. There was something of the brooding menace of the gray sea in the latter, and a note in his voice reminded me of the sullen mutter of the wind before a storm.

A little shiver of apprehension ran through me as I turned from him to my brother-in-law, Jason Drewe. Nothing could have been more utterly and infuriatingly complacent than the latter, who was leaning back in the most comfortable chair my office afforded, with an expensive cigar in his mouth, his big frame clad in the smartest of light tweeds, and an orchid in his buttonhole.

Jason was an extremely wealthy man, young enough to enjoy his money, and with a son to inherit his millions one day. The loss of Mavis, his wife, had been more of an annoyance than a grief to him; he felt that she had died merely to make things awkward for him—in fact, he added her death to the many grievances he treasured up against her.

I knew that if there is such a thing as a broken heart, he broke my sister's, and I hated him for it. I would have cut off all intercourse with him, only that I had promised Mavis to keep an eye on the boy, and

counteract his father's influence as far as possible. Jason knew nothing of this; he believed I hung on to him for the sake of his wealth and twitted me with it quite openly, in spite of the fact that I was never indebted to him for a single dime, and would have cleaned the streets, or sold "hot dogs" rather than owe him a penny.

It seemed absurd to pity him, especially at this moment of his triumph, when he had succeeded in getting the land he wanted at the price he wanted, and was sitting there before me as pink and pleased as a prize baby after its bottle.

Eldred Werne, whom Jason had just cornered so successfully, was the one whom most people would have pitied. But I had only admiration for anyone as determined and strong of soul as Werne. Poor and desperately ill though he was, he was not an object for pity.

As junior partner in the firm of Baxter and Baxter, real estate agents, I was present to witness the signatures and conclude the deal between Werne and Jason; and I wished a thousand times that Baxter and Baxter had never had this affair entrusted to them. It was a sordid, despicable business altogether.

"I'll sign," repeated Werne, drawing his chair closer to my desk, and taking up the parchments in his thin, blue-veined hands. "The land shall be yours at your own price—for the present!"

Anger and instant suspicion showed in Jason's small, heavy-lidded eyes.

"What the devil do you mean?" he said. "If you sign these papers the land is mine, and there's no power on earth can make me pay more for it than the sum set down there in black and white."

"I wasn't thinking of money." Werne's voice was strangely quiet and yet so full of menace that again I felt every nerve in my body thrill to it. "I am sure you will never pay more in money."

"You're right — dead right, Werne," Jason's resonant voice echoed through the room.

"And yet—I think you will pay more in the end. Yes, in the end you will pay more, Mr. Drewe."

Jason turned to me blustering and furious.

"Aren't these deeds water-tight? What does he mean? If there is any flaw in these agreements I'll stamp you and your fool firm out of existence!"

Before I could reply, Werne began to laugh. He sat there and laughed long and dreadfully, the bright color staining his thin cheeks, his gray eyes brilliant and malicious. He laughed until the cough seized him, and he leant back at last utterly exhausted, an ominous stain on the handkerchief he pressed to his lips.

"Let me relieve your natural anxiety, Mr. Drewe," he said at last, his hoarse voice still shaken with mirth. "You will pay more, but not in money! Not in any material sense at all."

"What in the name of common sense do you mean?" growled Jason.

"There is nothing common at all in the sense of which I speak. It is very uncommon indeed! I refer to payments which have no connection with money—nothing which can be reckoned in dollars and cents."

Jason looked uncertain whether to call police protection or medical aid, and he watched Werne narrowly as the latter signed the documents.

When the signatures were completed, Eldred Werne got to his feet and stood looking down at Jason—a long, strange, deep look, as if he meant to learn the other's every feature off by heart. Behind Werne's eyes once more a sudden terrifying flame of laughter danced—flickered—and was gone!

"You don't fear any payment that

will not reduce your bank account, then?"

"What other payment is there?" asked Jason in genuine surprize.

"You're wonderful!" said Werne. "So complete a product of your age and kind. So logical and limited and — excuse me — so thoroughly stupid!"

Jason's fresh-colored face turned a deep purple.

"If you were not a sick man——" he began.

"And one, moreover, whom you have thoroughly and satisfactorily fleeced," interpolated Werne.

"I should resent your remarks," continued Jason pompously. "As it is, I see no use in prolonging this conversation."

"Stay!" cried Werne, as Jason put on his fur coat and prepared to depart. "It's only fair to warn you that if I die out there in Denver City, I shall come back again! I shall be in a better position then, without this wretched body of mine. I shall come back—to make you pay —a more satisfactory price for my Tareytown acres."

Jason stared, standing in the doorway with one plump well-manicured hand on the door-knob, looking like a great shaggy ox in his fur coat, and with that air of stupid bewilderment on his broad face.

"Wha-a-a-at?" he stammered. Then, as the other's meaning slowly dawned on him, he leaned up against the door and showed every tooth in his head in a perfect bellow of mirth. "Are you threatening to haunt me?" he choked, the veins on his forehead swelling dangerously. "Well, my good fellow, if it gives you any comfort to imagine that, don't let me discourage your little idea. You'll be welcome at Tareytown any old time! The Tareytown specter, eh? It'll give quite an air to the place! What kind of payment will you want—moonshine, eh?" Jason almost burst with the humor of this remark. "Moonshine and ghosts! Seems the right sort of mixture!"

With a last fatuous chuckle, Jason opened the door; and, through the window, I saw him get into his new coupé and drive off, his face still creased in enjoyment of his last sally.

"The descent of man," murmured Werne, half to himself. "There's no doubt that Jason Drewe has descended a considerable way from the apes! The fool—the blind, besotted fool!"

2

It was a perfect day in the late autumn of that same year, when, for the first time, I saw the Tareytown estate.

I dismissed my taxi at the huge stone gateway, and walked slowly up through the woods. After the hectic rush and noise of New York, the golden stillness around me was deeply satisfying; and I thought of poor Eldred Werne, who would never know the beauty and healing peace of this place again. I had seen the notice of his death in Denver City, only a month after he had signed away his rights to these lovely Tareytown woods, and I had thought very often since of the lonely bitterness which must have clouded his last days.

Glimpses of the blue, shining Hudson shone between the trees, and beyond, the flaming russet of the Palisades. On all sides the country stretched out to dim, misty horizons for which Werne's dying eyes must have longed in his exile.

Then, quite suddenly, a chill passed over me. I became aware of the ominous and unusual stillness of the brooding woods. Neither bird nor squirrel darted to and fro among the leaves and branches—not even a fly buzzed about in the hazy sunshine.

I looked around in gathering apprehension. What *was* it that began to oppress me more and more? Why

did the tall trees seem to be listening?—why did I have the impulse to look over my shoulder?—why did my heart thump and my hands chill suddenly?

With a great effort I restrained myself from breaking into a run, as I continued upward toward the house. The path doubled back on itself across and across the shoulder of the hill on which the house, Red Gables, was built; and it was fully ten minutes before I arrived breathless in sight of its red roof and high old-fashioned chimney-stack.

In a corner of its wide porch, I caught a glimpse of a boy's figure and let out a loud halloo, glad of an excuse to break the queer, unnatural silence.

There was an answering hail, and my nephew, Tony, came running down the path to meet me.

"Hello, Uncle John! I was waiting for you! Did you walk up through the woods—alone?" The boy's voice held an awed note, which was emphasized by the look of fear in his dark eyes.

He was only eight years old, and exactly like his mother. Thank heaven, there was no trace of Jason's complacent materialism in his son . . . mind and body, Tony was an utterly different type. I loved the boy, and a real friendship had developed between us, despite the disparity of our years. He was curiously sensitive and mature for his age, and it was a great thing for a bachelor like myself to have a child make a little tin god of me, as Tony did.

"And why not walk alone through the woods?" I demanded, looking down at him as he rubbed his head against my arm like some friendly colt.

"I wouldn't," he replied simply.

"Why not, old man? There aren't any wolves or bears or even Indians left here, are there?"

"Don't laugh, Uncle." The boy's voice sank to a whisper. "There isn't time to tell you now, but there's something in those woods. Something you can't see—that—that is waiting!"

I stared at the boy, and once again the cold chill I had experienced during my walk up to the house crept over me.

"Look here, Tony," I began. "You mustn't get——"

"There is—there *is*, I tell you!" He was passionately in earnest. "Something that laughs—something that is waiting!"

"Laughs — waiting!" I echoed feebly.

"You'll hear it yourself," he answered. "Then you'll know. Father won't let me speak about it to him, and says if I'd play games instead of reading books, I'd only hear and see half what I do now."

"About as much as he hears and sees," I murmured to myself.

"I am sure Father hears it too, only he won't say so," continued Tony. "But I've noticed one thing —he won't let anyone knock at the doors. The servants even go into his study without knocking, and he was always so—so——"

"Exactly!" I said dryly; "I understand."

The small hand in mine gave a little warning pressure, and I saw Jason Drewe's big frame and massive head loom up in the comparative dimness of the interior, as Tony and I reached the entrance door of Red Gables.

"Well, John!" boomed my host, as he rose from the depths of a vast chair and came forward, cigar in hand. "Made your fortune yet?"

It was the form of greeting he invariably gave me; for he was that irritating type of man who uses a limited number of favorite witticisms and sticks to them persistently, in season and out of season.

Today, however, his complacent heartiness was obviously an immense

effort to him, and I was quite startled by the change in his appearance. He seemed conscious of it himself, but there was a certain bravado in the sunken eyes he turned on me, which defied me to remark on his ill looks.

I was certainly shocked to notice how much thinner he was, how gray his skin, and how hunted and restless were his eyes, as he kept glancing from side to side with a quick upward jerk of his big head, as though he were listening for some expected and unwelcome summons.

He motioned me to a chair and poured out drinks with a fumbling sort of touch, which further indicated the change in him since I last saw him in the office of Baxter and Baxter.

Tony curled up at my side on the arm of my easy-chair, as quiet as a doormouse, taking no part in the conversation, but his precocious intelligence enabled him to follow the drift of it; that I could swear to. He annoyed his father, this silent observant child, and in the middle of a discussion Jason turned irritably to the boy.

"Why don't you go off and amuse yourself out of doors like any other boy of your age? You sit round the house like a little lap-dog and waste your time with books—always mooning about like someone in a dream! Just like your mother—just like her," he finished in an exasperated mutter.

When we were alone, Jason turned to me with a frown. "More like a girl than a boy!" he commented bitterly. "About as much pep as a soft drink! What's the use of building up a business and making a future for him, when he'll let it all slip through his fingers later on?"

He went on talking rather loudly and quickly on the subject, with no help at all from me, and it struck me he was talking in order to defeat his own clamorous unpleasant thoughts; working himself up into a pretense of anger to make the blood run more hot and swift in his veins.

As far as he was able, within the limited scope of his primitive nature, Jason loved the boy, and every hope and ambition he cherished was centered round Tony, and Tony's future. I just let him run on, and speculated with increasing bewilderment on the cause of my brother-in-law's obvious uneasiness of soul. It must be something tremendous to have shaken his colossal egotism, I argued to myself, and moreover it was something he was desperately anxious to hide—some unacknowledged fear which had pricked and wounded him deep beneath his tough skin.

"I'm not satisfied with that school of his—not at all satisfied!" he went on. "I ask you now, what's the use of filling a kid's head with all that imaginary stuff when he's got to live in a world of Jews and politicians and grafters? How's he going to grind his own when his darned school has exchanged it for a silver butter knife? How's he going to——"

He broke off with a queer strangled groan as a sudden clamorous knocking sounded—a loud tattoo like the sound of war-drums through the quiet house.

The big sunshiny room darkened suddenly and a puff of wind from an open window at my side breathed an icy chill on my cheek. The horror I had recently experienced in the woods swept over me again, and I saw Jason's face set in a mask of fear and loathing.

Silence held us bound for a perceptible moment, and in the quiet a loud, echoing laugh rang out.

It sounded as though someone were standing just outside the house, and I had a vivid mental image of a figure convulsed and rocking with mirth. But this figure of my imagination did not move me to laughter

myself, although as a rule nothing is more contagious than laughter—but not this—not this hateful mirth!

I dashed to the window and looked out; then, making for the door in blind haste, I stumbled out on the porch and ran round the house in a queer frenzy of desire to learn who—or *what*—had stood there laughing . . . laughing . . . laughing.

I only caught a glimpse of frightened faces in the servants' quarters at the back of the house as I dashed past, and saw windows and doors being hastily slammed.

When I got back to the living-room again Jason was gone, and I sat down breathless, and shaken to the very soul. I had stumbled on to the secret—or part of it—with a vengeance; and I sat with my unlit pipe in my mouth for the better part of an hour, until the first overwhelming horror of the episode had faded a little.

Jason came in just as I was thinking of going up to my room to change for dinner, and any idea I might have entertained of asking him for explanations was foiled by the extraordinary change in him.

He was his old self again. Large, pink, and prosperous, he breezed into the room and stood with his hands in his pockets, grinning down at me from his massive six feet odd. If there was something defiant in the gleam of his blue eye, if his voice was harsh and his grin a trifle too wide, it needed someone who knew him as well as I did to detect it.

I never liked or admired him as much as I did at that moment; and the determination came to me, to stand by him in this trouble of his, to stay and fight it out, and give what help I could to him and the boy.

I am not a superstitious man, nor counted credulous by my friends or enemies. But here was something inexplicably evil which brooded over the lonely woods of Tareytown like some dark-winged genie.

I went slowly and thoughtfully up to my room, my mind heavy with doubt and perplexity, and as the night wore on and darkness closed in about the house, so did my mind grow darker and more fearful.

3

"WELL, Soames! Rather a change from your roof-garden in New York—eh? How do you like it here?"

The old gardener folded his gnarled hands one over the other on the handle of his spade, and shook his head slowly from side to side.

"It was an unlucky day for the master when he came to Tareytown, sir—an unlucky day!"

"How's that? Won't your plants grow for you?"

"You know, sir! I see by your face that you know already!"

"I must confess there's something a bit depressing about the place," I answered. "It's just the time of year, no doubt. There's always something melancholy about the fall."

"There's nothing wrong about the time of year," said the old man. He leaned forward and his voice sank to a whisper. "Haven't you *heard* it yet?"

I gave an involuntary start, and he pursed up his mouth and nodded.

"Aye, I see you have!"

He came closer and peered up at me, his brown face with its faded blue eyes a network of anxious wrinkles.

"Sir, if you can help the master, for God's sake do it! He's a rare hard one, I know, but I've served him for thirty-five years, and I don't want to see no harm come to him. He won't own up that he hears anything amiss, nor go away from this accursed place with the boy, before any harm comes to either of them. He's that angry because he don't understand—*won't* understand there's something more

than flesh and blood can hurt us sometimes!"

The old man's words came out in a flood, the result of long-suppressed anxiety, and I marveled that a man of Jason Drewe's type should command such solicitude from anyone.

"I'm all in the dark, Soames," I said slowly. "Who is it that knocks—that laughs?"

The gardener's eyes grew very somber. "No mortal man—no mortal man, sir."

"Why, Soames, you're as superstitious as they make them," I said, trying to make light of his words.

"See here, sir," he said, pulling me by the sleeve into the deeper shade of the shrubbery behind us. "I'll tell you what I've never spoken a word of yet. I'll tell you what I overheard one night when this—this *thing* first came here. I was pottering about late one evening, tying up bits of creeper against the wall outside the master's study. I heard the knock—loud and long as if the emperor of the world was a-knocking at the door, and I looks up to see who was there. The door was only three or four feet from where I was standing with bass and scissors in my hand. And there was no one at all on the steps nor anywhere near the house. While I was a-staring and wondering I heard the laugh! My blood went cold, and I just stood there shaking like a poplar tree in a wind. And since then, night after night, that knock and that laugh comes as regular as the sun sets!"

I stared at my companion in incredulous horror.

"And one time," he continued, "I heard the master call out. Terrible loud and fierce his voice was: *'Have you come for your moonshine, Eldred Werne?—take it!'* And with that, a bottle of whisky comes hurtling through the window and fell almost at my feet. I felt a wind blow across my face same as if it blew right off an iceberg; and as I stood there afraid to move hand or foot, I heard the laugh way down among the trees, getting fainter and fainter just as if someone was walking away down the path—and laughing and laughing to himself all the time!"

I listened aghast to the old man, and a vivid picture arose in my mind of Eldred Werne as I last saw him in life—the tall, emaciated figure, the arresting face with its beautifully chiseled features, and above all the strange gray eyes as they had dwelt in that last deep look on Jason, the burning mocking fire which lit them and the fathomless contempt of the strong mouth."

"You will pay—you will pay!" The words rang in my ears as if Werne were standing at my side speaking them at that very moment.

I sat down abruptly on a fallen tree, and lit a cigarette with unsteady fingers.

"Now look here, Soames," I said at last. "We mustn't let this thing get us scared out of all common sense and reason. I admit it's a beastly unpleasant business, but I can't—I won't believe yet that there is no natural explanation of these things. Someone who owes him a grudge may be putting one over on Mr. Drewe. It may be a deliberate plot to annoy and frighten him. There was a—er—well, a misunderstanding between your master and Mr. Werne over the purchase of this Tareytown estate, and Mr. Werne was quite capable of planning a neat little revenge to square his account a little. He was a very sick man, remember—and sick men are apt to be vindictive and unreasonable."

"I guessed as something had happened between the two," murmured Soames, "but I didn't rightly know what it was."

"You and I will watch the house from now on," I said. "We'll arrange to be outside, one or other or both of us, directly after sunset. And if—if we see nothing, if we find no one there——"

"Aye—you won't, sir!"

"Then I shall do my best to persuade Mr. Drewe to leave this place and return to the city."

"And that you'll never do. He'll never give in and go away, not if it means his death. The master is terrible obstinate, and he fair blazed up when I kind of suggested he wasn't looking just himself, and that maybe Tareytown didn't agree with him."

And remembering Jason's defiant eyes and the bluff he put up last evening for my benefit, I was inclined to agree with Soames.

"I'll do what I can," I said, getting up and brushing off twigs and leaves.

"I'm thankful to know you're here, sir. There was no one I dared say a word to until you came. The servants are in mortal terror, and never a week passes without one or more of them leaving. Soon we won't be able to get anyone to stay a night in the place!"

"If your master could be persuaded to send the boy away for the rest of his vacation——"

"He won't do that," was the lugubrious reply. "That would be sort of owning up that there *was* something here he was afraid of! He'll never admit that—never!"

4

Our first vigil took place that night. The boy was safe indoors—he never went over the threshold of the house after dusk fell, I noticed. Jason had established himself with his favorite drink, a stack of newspapers, and a box of cigars, in his library. I left him looking as immovable as the Rock of Gibraltar—and as gray!

Soames and I planted ourselves in strategic positions on either side of the porch, where we could see both the big entrance door, and the whole of the front porch which ran in front of the library, dining-room, and sun-parlor.

A pale moon sailed serenely overhead, and I felt a passionate longing to be as far away from this evil-haunted little piece of earth as was the moon itself. Revolt which was almost nausea seized me, as I looked around at the shadowy woods, and felt the unnamable creeping horror which waited there.

Slow minutes passed. The shadows grew denser, and the silence so profounded that the falling leaves rattled like metal things on the dry ground, and the creak of the great trees made my heart thump furiously against my ribs.

I could see Soames' small tense figure bent forward in a listening attitude, his face turned toward the entrance door. He looked like a terrier-dog straining eagerly on a leash.

My eyes roved restlessly to and fro, and fell at last on the long, uncut grass which grew about the tree-trunks. Quite suddenly I saw the reeds and grasses bend and quiver as if before a strong wind. In a long thin line they bent—a line advancing rapidly from the blackness of the trees out toward the open—toward the house—toward the entrance porch, with its broad steps gleaming silver in the moonlight.

My hand flew to my throat to stifle the cry that rose as I saw that sinister trail being blazed before my eyes. It advanced to the extreme edge of the tall grasses in a direct line with the entrance-door.

A moment of unendurable suspense—an agony of terrified expectant waiting! Then it came—loud—thunderous—awful as the stroke of doom! The knocker had been removed from the door, and on the bare wood itself beat that devil's tattoo.

I was paralyzed with the shock and thunder of it, and only when I saw Soames stumbling forward, and heard his hoarse cry, did I move—stiff and uncertainly as a man might move after a long illness.

We clutched each other like two terrified children when we arrived at the foot of the steps, and I felt Soames's body shaking against my own.

Then, abruptly, the infernal racket ceased; and in the momentary silence which ensued, a laugh broke out that sent our trembling hands over our ears, but we could not shut out the sound of that demoniac laughter. Uncontrolled and triumphant it rang out again and again, and the vision of someone rocking with mirth rose as before in my imagination.

But nothing was there on the porch in the moonlight!

The whole porch was visible in the clear white light. No one, no thing, could have escaped our staring, straining eyes. There was no one there, and yet almost within touch of our outstretched hands some invisible, intangible Thing stood laughing—laughing—laughing. . . .

5

After that night the horror fell more and more darkly.

Soames, who was out all day working in the gardens and shrubberies, noticed increasingly sinister signs that our invisible enemy was marshaling his forces, and closing in on the last stages of the siege.

More and more frequently the old man would see the grasses bending and swaying around him in loops and circles, as though the laughing Thing moved to and fro in the mazes of some infernal dance. Often Soames felt the chill of the Thing's passing, and noted the shriveled, blighted foliage which marked its trail.

The woods grew darker with every passing day, despite the thinning of the leaves. The autumn mists which lay so white and cloudlike in the valleys of the surrounding country, drifted in among the trees on the Tareytown estate like gray, choking smoke, dank and rotten with the breath of decay, shutting out the sunlit earth beyond, and the clear skies above, rolling up around the house with infinite menace and gloom.

Louder and more clamorous grew the nightly summons, and the laughter which followed echoed and reechoed about the house throughout the night, sounding at our very windows, then growing faint and ominous from the depths of the brooding woods.

6

At last, the boy's terror precipitated a crisis.

Jason, who had brought this cursed thing upon himself, it seemed, refused to acknowledge that he had been wrong, to make any amends which lay within his power, or even to move from the place which Eldred Werne had loved so passionately in the flesh, and haunted so persistently in the spirit.

Jason's courage, though I admired it in one way, was not of the highest order. I mean that his conduct was guided by no reason, but only by blind impulse.

I tackled him more than once about Tony, and only succeeded in rousing furious opposition.

"What the devil are you driving at?" he roared at me. "This is my house, isn't it? These are my woods and my lands. I paid for them according to my bond. No one is going to drive me out—no one, d'you hear?—neither man nor devil!"

"But Tony!" I protested. "You ought to consider him. He hears the servants talking. He hears whatever it is that comes knocking at your door, Jason—you know best what it is! The boy is almost beside himself with fear. Can't you see he is desperate? He doesn't eat or sleep properly. D'you want to kill him as you did his mother?" I added bitterly, remembrance of my sister's lonely,

unhappy life with Jason goading me to speech.

But Jason was always impervious to anything he wished to ignore, and he brushed aside my last words and returned to Tony.

"The boy has got to learn—he's got to learn, I say! If this house is good enough for me, then it's good enough for him, too. Tony'll stay here with me to the end of his vacation. If I give in about this thing, it will be the thin end of the wedge. He'll expect me to indulge every girl's fad and fancy he has—and the Lord knows he's full of them! Here I stay, and here he stays, and that's all about it. Why on earth do you stay yourself, feeling as you do?" he added roughly. "If you're afraid, I'll excuse you the rest of your visit."

I didn't trouble to deny the fact that I was afraid, and went off cursing myself for interfering, and probably making Tony's relations with his father even more difficult.

7

THAT evening Jason seemed absolutely possessed. Whether he had been drinking heavily, or whether his endurance had reached the breaking-point suddenly in the long, silent combat of wills with his invisible enemy, or whether the blind gray figure of Fate had written the last chapter, and he had no choice but to obey, I do not know.

Everything that happened that last fatal night seemed obscured and fogged with the waves of terror and desolation that swept over the house and the surrounding woods.

From early morning the attack on us strengthened perceptibly. Every hour I felt we were fighting a losing battle, and I had no comfort for Soames when he sought me out, and led me off to the potting-sheds after a pretense of breakfasting.

Tony had remained in bed, to his father's unbounded disgust. The boy had spent a sleepless night and I had given him a bromide and persuaded him to stay in his room to rest.

"Making a mollycoddle of him!" growled Jason, his eyes light and dangerous as a wild boar's above his flabby, sallow cheeks. He put down his cup with a rattle on the saucer, and scraping his chair noisily on the polished flooring, he rose and strode heavily out of the room, and I heard the stairs creak under his weight as he went up to the boy.

Throughout the day, his evil mood grew on him, and Tony could do nothing right.

"Mark my words, sir," Soames had said to me as we stood in the potting-sheds that morning. "I've a feeling we've about come to the end! That Laughing Devil will knock for the last time tonight—for the last time! Mark my words!"

And as the day wore on I felt more and more assured that Soames was right.

Every hour the sense of imminent and immense danger grew heavier, and every hour Tony grew more and more nervous and Jason more brutally obstinate; for the sight of the boy's terror goaded his father into senseless anger.

The sun set that night in a bank of heavy dull cloud, which spread and darkened until thick impenetrable dusk closed about us.

With the coming of twilight we waited in fearful anticipation of our usual visitation; but dusk deepened to night and no summons sounded at the door, no mocking horror of laughter was heard at all.

Yet this silence brought no feeling of reprieve. Rather our expectancy grew more and more tense, and Tony sat by the fire with cold shaking hands thrust deep into his pockets, and tried to prevent his father noticing the ague of fear which shook his thin little body.

Jason did not send him to bed at his usual time—we all sat there waiting—just waiting!

The big logs smoldered dully and reluctantly on the hearthstone. Jason's face was a gray mask; his thick lips sneered; his eyes gleamed between their puffy lids. He was like a cornered animal of some primeval age—a great inert mass of flesh slumped down in his big chair by the dying fire.

Nine—ten—eleven! The torturing hours crept on and still we sat there like people under a spell, just waiting—waiting!

With the deep midnight chime of the clock in the library, the spell was broken with a hideous clamor that made Tony leap up with the shriek of a wild thing caught in a trap.

Jason got to his feet in one surprizing movement, and stood with feet apart and lowered head, as if about to do battle.

I sat clutching the arms of my chair, held by a blind terror that was like steel chains about me.

It was the Laughing Thing at last! Long and furiously the knock resounded, sinking to a low mutter and rising to a crescendo of blows that threatened to batter down the heavy door. And over and above the thunderous blows rose the high mocking laughter—triumphant, cruel, satisfied laughter!

I blame myself—I shall always blame myself for what happened then. I might have held the boy back—guarded him more closely when he was too frenzied with fear to guard himself. But I did not dream what he was about until it was too late! When he ran from the shelter of my arms, I thought he meant to seek another refuge!

But no—the boy was crazed beyond all reason and control, and ran desperately to the very horror which had driven him mad.

I heard his quick, light steps along the hall, and I thought he was making for the staircase, not the door—my God, not the door!

There was the quick rattle of a heavy chain, the groan of a bolt withdrawn—then a long, wailing shriek of terror!

With one accord Jason and I dashed out into the hall—Soames came rushing from the kitchen-quarters—and there stood the door flung wide, and from the porch without came a long exultant peal of laughter.

We flung ourselves forward and out into the night. In the distance among the trees we heard the dying echoes of that infernal laughter—then nothing more.

8

UNTIL dawn we searched the woods of Tareytown, and as the first gray glimmer of light broke in the east we found him.

Have you ever seen anyone dead of a sudden violent poison—such as prussic acid—with teeth showing in a terrible grin—the muscles of the face stiffened in inhuman laughter? It is the most dreadful of all masks which death can fix on human lineaments.

So we found Tony!

His eyes—awful contrast to his grinning mouth—mirrored a terror too profound for any words to convey. Eyes which had looked on the unnamable—the unthinkable; spawn of that outermost darkness which no human sight may endure.

THAT night was the end of my youth and happiness. Jason packed up and went for a prolonged tour of Europe with his fears and his memories, and I have never seen him since.

For myself, I live, and will always live, on the Tareytown estate, where perhaps Tony's spirit may wander lost and lonely, still possessed by that evil which caught him in its net.

I must remain at Red Gables, and perhaps here or hereafter I may atone

for the selfish fear which made me fail Tony in that desperate crisis.

Somewhere—somehow, beyond the curtain of this life, I may meet the Thing which laughed—the evil, bitter Thing which once was Eldred Werne—the Thing which may still possess the boy and hold him earthbound and accurst.

I failed Tony once, but I will not do so a second time. I will offer my own soul to set him free—and perhaps the high gods will hear me and accept the sacrifice.

A Five-Minute Story

The Inn in the Wood

By C. I. MARTIN

IT STOOD by the white, dusty track which ran through the gloomy wood down to the wide gray sea of the Normandy coast. Before the door stood a man with a hunted face, and hesitated, glancing over his shoulder at the path which had led him here from the sea-shore.

Night was falling; in the shades of the wood it was already dark. He was wet and weary. The folds of his long cloak dripped on the dusty path as he stood. It was odd, he thought, that he had not marked the inn when he passed that way in the morning. But then he had not been alone, and had had that in his mind which might have taken him unheeding past twenty inns.

He shivered slightly as if with cold. There were many miles between him and the little fishing village he had left at dawn, and he had no fancy for retracing the path through the woods in darkness, and alone. The trees could hide many things. He would do better to spend the night here.

Yet the inn did not look very cheerful. He glanced up at the creaking sign to discover the name, but the letters were too dim. The site too was strangely chosen, for there appeared to be a graveyard on one side; dim gray shapes as of tombstones glimmered in the dusk. But what mattered that to him, if he could find warmth and shelter within? Through a window he saw a fire leap and glow. It decided him, and turning to the half-open door he was about to knock, when it was flung wide, and the host stood bowing in the doorway.

"You are welcome, *Monsieur*. Would *Monsieur* be pleased to enter?"

The traveler went in, and the plump little man barred the door. He was dressed in rusty black; a smile was on his face and his eyes shone as he looked at his guest, and rubbing his hands, predicted a terrible night. His manner was almost exulting, thought the other, and as he gazed at him he shivered, and almost wished himself out in the dark wood again, but that was folly.

He curtly demanded a room, wine and a fire by which to dry his garments. All these he could have, and that speedily. He followed his host up a flight of stairs, and still, though the door was barred below, he glanced with a hunted look over his shoulder.

At the top they entered a large room hung with faded tapestry. On it was represented the bottom of the sea, and as the wind stirred it, the fishes seemed to swim, and the long coils of seaweed to wave with the motion of the water. The traveler looked at it with distaste.

Monsieur did not like the tapestry? enquired the host. Alas! he had no other empty room, and when *Monsieur* slept it would not trouble him.

The other shrugged his shoulders and looked around. A fire leapt on the open hearth; beside it wine and glasses stood on a table; in a corner were two narrow beds, and through the open window came the distant roar of the sea.

The newcomer looked with surprize on these preparations, and his host, following his gaze, smiled and said, "*Monsieur* sees he was expected."

"But how——?" stammered the other. "I had no thought of coming here tonight."

"*Monsieur* would have found it hard to pass *this* door."

"Leave me!" he exclaimed, angry with the smile which seemed to triumph over him. "But first draw that window to. The sea roars too loudly for me tonight."

"Yet *Monsieur* has been closely acquainted with the sea today," said the little man as he advanced to do his bidding. "The sea is strong, *Monsieur*, but it does not keep all it holds."

The traveler shot a glance of terror at him, but the fat round face was as smiling as ever.

"What do you mean?" stammered the pale lips.

"Nay, what should I mean save that *Monsieur's* garments are wet? It is easy to see he has struggled," pointing as he spoke to a long rent in his cloak.

The traveler shuddered and threw the garment from him.

Still smiling, his host went out, closing the door behind him.

Once more he was alone. Drawing up a seat close to the fire he crouched over it to dry his clothes, but they dripped—and dripped—and never had done dripping. And the firelight glanced on the little pools until they looked like blood.

For a time he sat motionless, then groaned, and rising, paced to and fro. He stood still at length by the beds. In his trouble he had not before noted there were two, and he called the host up to explain.

"It is the custom of the house, *Monsieur*. No one here sleeps alone," he explained with a sidelong smile.

"I share my room with no stranger," was the haughty reply.

"He will be no stranger," said the little man as he closed the door.

The wind rose, and the sea sounded louder than before. He had not thought it was so near. He flung the window open, expecting to see it through the trees. The sign creaked below. It was nearer here, and as it swung toward him he read in dim letters: "Retribution"; above was a sword and scales. And then he saw on the road a sight that made his heart stand still—a double track in the dust. He would fly, but whither? On one side was the wood, on the other the sea. He moaned, and crouched in hopeless apathy over the dying fire.

All was still now, very still. There was a stir below. Was it the host coming up again? No, it was a step he knew. It came nearer, and ever nearer, with a plashy sound upon the stairs. He crouched in the farthest corner of the room, his eyes fixed on the door. Now there was but that between him and the thing without. It opened, and on the threshold stood the brother he had drowned, with wide, unseeing eyes, and a coil of wet seaweed in his dead hand.

The Cloth of Madness*

By SEABURY QUINN

JAMISON ALVARDE, the noted interior decorator, was dying. His family physician knew it; the neat, white-starched nurse—almost waspish in her impersonal devotion to her professional duties—knew it; the eminent graduate of Hopkins and Vienna, called into consultation, whose fee would be more than the annual maintenance of a poor ward in the City Hospital, knew it; Alvarde's next of kin, a niece and nephew, hastily summoned from halfway across the continent, knew it; and—which was most important of all—Jamison Alvarde knew it.

The last rays of the December sun slanted through the casement of the sick man's room, falling directly upon the bed and illuminating his face as though with a rosy spotlight. This was fitting and proper, since he was the principal character in the short tragedy about to be enacted.

It was not an ill-looking face the afternoon sun bent its brief valedictory on. Jamison Alvarde's plentiful hair was iron-gray in color and swept up from his high, placid forehead in an even-crested pompadour. His eyebrows were heavy and intensely black, and the deepset eyes beneath them were as gray as frosted glass. While his long illness had etched fine lines about the corners of his eyes and at the ends of his narrow lips, it had not robbed his cheeks of their rich, olive coloring, and even in the antechamber of death his mouth retained its firm, almost cruel, set.

In a far corner of the room, the family physician whispered fussily to the next of kin. Waiting for a patient to die is tiresome business, especially when one is hungry and when one expects to have roast lamb with caper sauce for dinner.

"Yes, yes!" he was saying. "Mr. Alvarde has had a great deal of trouble the last year, a very great deal of trouble. He has never been the same since that terrible affliction fell upon his wife and his friend at his country place in the Highlands. A tragedy, my dear young friends, a very great tragedy; quite enough to break anyone's health. I've no doubt that Mr. Alvarde's present illness is directly traceable to that—er—unfortunate occurrence; no doubt whatever."

Alvarde's wasted, nervous hands paused a minute in their restless fumbling at the bedclothes. His thin, straight lips twisted a moment in an

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inscrutable smile, and his pale lids slowly lowered till they nearly hid his roving gray eyes. With that unwonted sharpening of the senses which often comes to those weakened in body, he had heard the doctor's whispered conversation.

The mention of that June morning when his wife and friend had been discovered in their rooms, hopelessly imbecile, brought no grimace of horror to the sick man's face. Rather, he smiled whimsically to himself, as if there were something not altogether unpleasing to him in the memory.

THE afternoon sun sank behind the line of hills across the river. The great specialist got into his fur-lined overcoat and his imported motor car and drove home. The family physician left instructions to be called immediately there was any change in Mr. Alvarde's condition and went home to his lamb and capers. The next of kin tiptoed downstairs to dinner, and Jamison Alvarde was left alone with his thoughts and the white-clad nurse.

"Nurse," Alvarde raised himself slightly on one elbow, "open the lower left-hand drawer of the desk and bring me the little black book you'll find there. . . .

"Now give me my fountain pen, please," he directed, when the sharp-featured girl had brought the book and adjusted the pillows behind his back.

The nurse withdrew to the window, watching the last spots of sunlight on the river, and Alvarde commenced to scribble on the flyleaf of the book before him. As he wrote—difficultly, for he was very weak—the same faintly reminiscent smile he had worn in the afternoon settled again on his tight-pressed lips.

Half, three-quarters, of an hour his pen traveled laboriously over the book's blank leaf; then, with a faint sigh of satisfaction, as at a task well done, Jamison Alvarde lay back upon his pillows.

The nurse crossed the room to remove the book and pen, paused a second, looking into her patient's face, then hurried to the telephone to call the family physician.

She might have saved herself the trouble and allowed the good doctor to finish his dinner in peace. Jamison Alvarde had no need of his services, or of any other physician's. Jamison Alvarde was dead.

THE customary three days elapsed, and in the morning of the fourth they took Jamison Alvarde from his residence on the Drive to a new home in Shadow Lawns. It was a very stylish and dignified funeral, for Alvarde had left a respectable estate, and the high-priced funeral director who conducted the obsequies understood his business thoroughly.

On the fifth evening Alvarde's attorney—a dapper little man, much addicted to wing collars and neat, double-breasted jackets—called and read his deceased client's last will and testament to the next of kin, who, as was expected, proved also to be his residuary legatees, one-third of the estate having been left the dead man's wife. Then the lawyer took up the business of straightening out Alvarde's affairs.

"It will be necessary," he informed them, stuffing the will back into his saddle-leather brief-bag, "to let me have all your uncle's papers which are in the house."

"The only papers of Uncle Jamison's we found in the house are bound in a little black book," the niece remarked. "He'd been writing in it just before he died."

When the little book was forthcoming and he had tucked it in his overcoat pocket, the lawyer seated himself in his automobile and started on his homeward trip. Before the motor had traversed two blocks he took out the slender volume and opened it. He

was no waster of time; his capacity for making every minute count had won him his enviable standing at the bar.

The first words which struck his eye were written in a weak, straggling hand—the words Jamison Alvarde had penned on the night of his death.

"What the devil!" the lawyer exclaimed as he slowly spelt out the sprawling characters of the inscription. "Did the old fool try to make another will on his death-bed?"

"The old fool" was his late lamented client, the commencement of whose *ante-mortem* writing was such as to warrant his assumption that a last will and testament had been attempted.

He read:

I, Jamison Alvarde, being of sound mind and memory (which is more than some I know are), but being weakened in body, and about to die, do declare the following statement to be the true explanation of the mental derangement which occurred to my wife, Edith, and my friend, Hector Fuller, at my country place last summer.

"Vengeance is mine," saith the Lord; but I anticipated Providence in demanding reparation. As a piece of revenge my work is not devoid of good points.

My one regret in publishing this memoir is that I shall not be present to hear the comments of the fools who have sympathized with me in my "affliction."

JAMISON ALVARDE.

"Humph," the lawyer turned the scribbled fly-leaf over; "so Alvarde's mind was wandering at the last, eh? Wonder how much more of this stuff he wrote in bed that night?"

The next page answered his question. Following the leaf upon which the scrawling introduction was scratched, the book was written in a firm, clear hand, the hand Alvarde had penned in health. The pages were filled with detached paragraphs, like diary entries, but undated. The first sheet was torn diagonally across, so that the first sentence was incomplete.

* * * * * *

——somewhat cool for this time of year. Excepting the tower, the house is fully completed, and we shall live here while the carpenters are finishing up.

I have asked Hector Fuller up for the week-end. Edith protested against his coming; for, with every woman's loathing of the unattainable, she has taken his impregnable bachelorhood as a deliberate affront. But Fuller is my friend, and whether Edith is pleased with his visit or not is of no moment to me. This is my house and Edith is my wife; and I mean to be master of both.

FULLER came this afternoon. I watched Edith narrowly when she greeted him, for I had determined to cut her allowance in two if she were discourteous to him. She blushed to the roots of her hair when she gave him her hand, and his face colored, too. Fuller looked uncomfortably at me out of the corner of his eye, and I caught a sidelong glance from Edith which reminded me of the look Regina, my Irish setter, gives me when she knows I am about to beat her for worrying the poultry. I was sorry for Fuller; having to be polite to a hostess who dislikes you must be uncomfortable business.

FULLER is a sly old dog! Pretending misogynist that he is, always preaching the joys of an Eveless Eden, I've caught him red-handed in a flirtation with some silly woman—and, I believe, a married one, at that.

This afternoon I came in late from inspecting the decorations of the Grayson mansion drawing-room, and as I was about to mount the stairs I noticed a bit of folded paper lying on the floor. The sight of this trash on my hall carpet angered me; I hate such clutter and disorder.

I was about to pitch the scrap of paper in the fireplace when I noticed that it was house stationery and was written on. I opened it and recognized Fuller's writing.

My darling:

The ordeal was terrible. How I hate to have to pretend; how you hate it; how I hate to see you obliged to do it! If only you-know-who would go away, so that we could cast aside this hideous mask, how happy we could be!

My dear, there are not words enough in all the languages combined to tell you how I love you. I'd rather kiss the print of your little foot in the dust than the lips of any other woman on earth. Oh, if only that brute could be got rid of!

Only a few more days, dear one, and the ghastly comedy we're playing will be finished. Then I will be at liberty to meet you once more at the old accustomed place.

My darling, my darling, I love you!

HECTOR.

"H'm!" I muttered, as I shoved the slushy thing into my jacket pocket. "'That brute' they're so anxious to be rid of is undoubtedly the lady's husband. Abuse the husband to flatter the wife, every time!"

We husbands are always brutes once we're pledged, with bell, book and candle, to provide a living for some worthless female. We're precious enough before they've put their halter on us, though, I've noticed! I dare say Edith thinks me a brute, though the devil knows it keeps my nose to the grindstone, paying for her fripperies.

I found Fuller in his room, dressing for dinner, and gave him his note.

"Next time, don't be so careless with your *billets d'amour*," I cautioned. "Someone might find it and pass it along to her husband, you know."

The shot went home. Fuller turned as pale as if a ghost had entered the room with me, and faced about with a spring, as though expecting me to attack him.

"I suppose you'll demand that I leave the house immediately?" he asked, when he saw that I had no immediate intention of assaulting him.

I laughed. "My dear boy," I told him, "it's a matter of perfect indifference to me how much you protest your hatred of the sex in public and flirt with them in private. Only you're so ungodly absent-minded with your mash notes! I found that gummy thing of yours lying in plain sight on the hall floor. Is your brain so addled with love of the fair one that you forget to post your letters to her?"

He regarded me a moment as a condemned criminal might the messenger who brings his reprieve, and jammed the note into his waistcoat pocket.

"Thanks, old man," he gulped. "Awfully good of you to bring it to me!"

"Oh, that's all right!" I assured him as I started to my own room to dress. "Don't bother about thanking me."

Funny, what a doddering fool love can make of a sensible man like Fuller.

I WISH Fuller would use more discretion in his choice of a light o' love. She uses lily of the valley.

Lily of the valley is the one thing about which Edith has defied me. Time and again I've ordered her never to bring the pestilent stuff into my house, and every time I've found a phial of it on her dressing-table I've flung it out the window; yet her hair, her finger tips and her lingerie fairly reek with it, despite my commands.

I came out late from town this evening, and Grigsby, the butler, informed me that Fuller had dropped out during the afternoon and had put up in his usual room. I stopped in his quarters for a little chat before going to bed. He had already turned in, but was still awake. His clothes were sprawled all over the room in the careless way he always throws them when he crawls into bed, and I had no choice but to share the same chair with his dinner jacket.

I'd scarcely gotten seated and lighted a cigar when I began to notice the unpleasant proximity of lily of the valley scent. At first I couldn't make out where the annoying odor

came from, but a few sniffs localized its source. Fuller's dinner jacket was redolent with the perfume.

"No doubt you find it very comforting to have your lady love rest her head on your shoulder," I grumbled, "but, for heaven's sake, why don't you get her to use some other scent? I loathe this stuff as the devil does holy water."

He gaped at me like a goldfish viewing the sunlight through the walls of an aquarium.

"What d'ye mean, 'some other scent'?" he asked. "I don't follow you."

"Why, this infernal lily of the valley." I tapped the scented shoulder of his jacket in explanation. "I hate it more than any other smell this side of H_2S. Edith uses it until I think, sometimes, I'll have to commit suicide—or murder—to get rid of it."

Fuller's eyes widened like a cat's in the twilight.

"D-does Edith—Mrs. Alvarde—use that perfume?" he stammered.

"You're devilish well right, she does, *ad nauseam!*" I growled as I got up. "And for the Lord's sake, get your woman to use something else. It's bad enough to have Edith scenting up the place, without your lugging a lot of the stuff in on your clothes."

I HAVE thought the whole matter over very carefully. I shall kill them both.

The scales fell from my eyes tonight (perhaps I would better say they were snatched from my eyes) and I see what a blind, fatuous, doting cuckold I have been for the fiend only knows how long. The shame of it is maddening.

Spring has broken early this year and summer is upon us; the roses in the lower garden are budding out, and the double row of dogwood trees which flanks the drive is festival-clad in a white surplice of blossoms.

The decorations of the Grayson house were all completed today, but I had to stay late catching up a few loose ends, so that it was well after dark when I reached home.

Fuller was out on one of the visits which have become rather frequent of late, and he and Edith had dined when I arrived. She was in the music room, strumming idly on the piano and singing softly to herself when I passed through the hall. Fuller had gone to his room for some reason or other. I could hear the sickly sentimental refrain of the popular ballad she was thrumming as I went up the stairs:

There's a kiss that you get from baby,
  There's a kiss that you get from Dad,
There's a kiss that you get from Mother,
  That's the first real kiss you've had.
There's a kiss with a tender meaning,
  Other kisses you recall;
But the kisses I get from you, sweetheart,
  Are the sweetest kisses of all.

Something in the spring air, the shower of pearl moonbeams I'd just driven through, or the appealing lilt of the song downstairs—perhaps all three—set my pulses throbbing at an unwonted tempo; I climbed the last ten steps humming the silly words under my breath:

There's a kiss with a tender meaning,
  Other kisses you recall. . . .

In his room across the hall from mine Fuller was moving about, alternately whistling and humming the same banal refrain. The words came softly through the closed door of his room:

  Other kisses you recall,
But the kisses I get from you, sweetheart,
  Are the sweetest kisses of all.

Strange how a snatch of song on a spring evening will carry a man's mind back to scenes he has never thought to see reflected on his memory's screen again. As I knotted my tie I remembered my first sweetheart, pretty and blue-eyed and blond. I used to have a trick of pulling off her glove when I brought her home from

some party, and kissing all five of her pink little fingers.

Poor Elsie; when her husband died he left no insurance and God knows how many children. She came to me for help, but she had no business qualifications, couldn't even type; so there was nothing I could do for her.

Then there was another girl—a slender thing with a painted face, a robemaker's manikin. Her masculine acquaintances had been the sort who wear colored derby hats and converse in terms of the race-track and pool-room. I was the first man of breeding she had known, and she was as grateful for the common or garden variety of courtesy as a stray dog for a scrap of meat.

She knew only one medium of exchange, and her timid little offers of passion were pitiful to see.

I gave her three hundred dollars; rather a handsome settlement, considering our respective positions. A child more or less doesn't matter to her kind. . . . I've often wondered what became of her. . . .

Fuller was still singing to himself when I finished dressing and went down to the dining-room. Edith had left the house and was sitting on a stone bench at the lower end of the terrace, watching the boats go by on the river below. In her white dinner frock, with the moonlight on her arms and shoulders, she was almost as pale as the marble Psyche at the other end of the walk.

A chilly breath of wind swept up from the river, rustling the dogwood blossoms and shaking the scrim curtains at the dining-room windows. Edith felt it as it passed and shivered a little.

"She'll be cold without her wrap," I speculated as I poured myself a stiff appetizer of Irish whisky and rang for Grigsby to serve dinner.

A bar from the song recurred to me:

> There's a kiss with a tender meaning . . .
> But the kisses I get from you, sweetheart . . ."

I went into the music-room, picked up Edith's China-silk scarf, and stepped through the French window to the lawn.

Walking quietly across the short-cut grass, I approached her from the rear, softly humming the refrain.

"But the kisses I get from you, sweetheart, are the sweetest kisses of all," I finished aloud, dropping the shawl over her narrow shoulders, putting my hands over her eyes, and bending forward to kiss her full upon the lips.

Her white, thin hands flew up from her lap and clasped about my neck, drawing my cheek close to hers.

"Oh!" she cried, and the exclamation was about a sob, "my dear, my dear. I've been thinking you'd never come! I've been so lonesome."

Then she struck me playfully on the cheek and gave a sniff of disapproval.

"Hector," she scolded, "you've been drinking that horrid Irish whisky, and you know how I hate it. *He* uses it!"

I released her eyes and sprang back, livid with fury. So this was the explanation of that lovesick note I'd found in my hall when Fuller was here before! This accounted for the scent on his dinner jacket; this was the clue to his sudden craze for coming unannounced to my house—always when I was from home.

But my mind worked with the agility of a leaping cat. Before Edith had time to recover from the horror the discovery of her error had given her, I had landed fairly on my mental feet.

I threw back my head and laughed; laughed naturally, laughed uproariously.

"By the Lord Harry, old girl," I cried, pounding my thigh in a perfect paroxysm of counterfeit mirth, "that's the best joke I've heard you spring in years! Everyone knows you hate Hector Fuller worse than a hen hates a rainstorm, and now you

call me by his name and pretend you thought you were kissing him!" Again I rocked forward in a spasm of laughter. "And I can just about imagine how you'd have written the ten commandments on his face with your nails if it really had been Fuller!"

All the while I was watching her as a snake does a bird, noting the look of blank amazement which slowly replaced the terrified gaze she had first turned to me when she discovered her mistake.

"Let's go in the house and have some music; it's too cold for you out here, dear," I concluded, as soon as I had calmed down my mock amusement.

She rose as obediently as a well-trained dog and accompanied me across the lawn in silence. But she shuddered slightly as I put my arm about her. Women have no control of their emotions.

While I smoked three or four cigarettes, she played and sang for me, and then, pleading a headache—the old, threadbare excuse of all her sex since Eve first left the garden—begged leave to go up to bed.

I let her go and went out to the stable. I harnessed the cob to the village cart and drove furiously along the country lanes for three hours, lashing the horse fiercely whenever he dropped out of a gallop. The poor brute was nearly foundered when I turned him home; but I was as raging wild as ever.

I have thought the whole matter over very carefully. I shall kill them both.

Last night I said I should kill them both. Today I know I must kill them, or they will surely kill me. A sentence from Fuller's treacherous note to Edith has been pounding in my head all day with the monody of a funeral dirge:

> ". . . if that brute could only be got rid of!"

When faithless wives and false friends conspire to be rid of an inconvenient husband the number of his days is appointed. The dockets of our criminal courts bear eloquent testimony of that.

A weakling would seek divorce as the easy solution of my difficulty; but I am no maudlin fool, ready to efface myself, leaving the way clear for them to flaunt their triumph and my dishonor before the world. I appeal from the fool-made and fool-administered law that offers divorce, to the higher law which ruled when the winds first soughed through the primeval forests; the law which the wise old Hebrew summed up with his terse, "An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth."

I must be very careful in my execution of these two, this man who has ravished away my honor before my eyes and the woman who has sold my good name for a kiss. Except for them, no one must suspect my vengeance; for it is no part of my plan to die like a felon for having exacted the justice which the law denies me.

I must kill them, but I must be careful—very careful.

If I were a superstitious man I should say that the Fates have decided to aid me in the furtherance of my plans. While I was lunching at the Republique today, Howard Enright dropped into the chair opposite me. I greeted him sourly enough, for I was in no mood for conversation, but he refused to be rebuffed.

He is just back from an extended tour of the East, where he has picked up enough expensive junk for his house to fill three museums and impoverish half a dozen millionaires. Despite my curt answers, he rambled on about the thousand and one *objets de vertu* he'd lugged half-way around the world, until I was ready to believe that he'd brought the whole *Arabian*

Nights home with him. Othello's tales of

> . . . anthropophagi,
> And men whose heads do grow below
> their shoulders,

were hackneyed beside the wonders Enright would display at his galleries.

He had a jade Buddha that caught and held the sunlight until the beholder was ready to swear that the image was filled with living fire. He had lachrymatories from Persia—tall, spindle-necked bottles, coming in pairs, into which the Persian widows wept, that the fullness of the bottles might be an outward and visible sign of the fullness of their grief at their husbands' taking-off. He had a great fan from Korea, where there was an ancient custom that no widow might remarry till her husband's grave was dry. The fan, he explained, was to be used by the lady in hastening the aridness of her lord's burial mound. He had bits of porcelain from the dynasties of Han and Ming—things so fragile that the Chinese called them "frozen air," and so precious that they were worth their weight in rubies.

I was thoroughly bored by his graphic cataloguing of the stock of his junkshop, and had given up the attempt to stifle a yawn, when he wound up with:

"And I've something else, Alvarde, that will appeal to you as an interior decorator."

"Indeed?" I masked the yawn with my hand.

"Yes, sir. Weirdest thing you ever saw; regular old marrow-freezer! They call it 'the cloth of madness,' and there's a legend to the effect that whoever looks at it loses his reason. Some vengeful old raja had it woven for the special benefit of some friends he suspected of forgetting that the harem is sacred, inviolate."

"Well, did it work?" I queried, more for the sake of politeness than anything else.

"They say it did. According to tradition he had an asylumful of crazy friends and acquaintances in less than no time. Anyhow, I couldn't get one of the natives to look at the thing. Rummy lot, those Indians."

I smiled my appreciation of the wily old maharaja's finesse.

"What does it look like, this 'cloth of madness' of yours?" I asked.

"Oh," Enright spread his hands wide in preparation for an eloquent description, "it's—it's—it's—— Oh, hang it all, man, I can't describe the beastly thing to you! All red and full of funny, twisty black lines, like snakes and lizards and—why, Alvarde, it's like an X-ray of a guilty conscience! Come around to the shop and see for yourself; I'd never be able to make you imagine the thing's damnable fascination."

"There might be an idea for some bizarre pattern in wall-hanging," I reflected. "New designs are hard to find nowadays." So I went with him to the shop.

He undid several yards of coco-matting wrappings and unfurled a small oblong of crimson cloth for my inspection.

At first sight of the thing I was ready to laugh in his face; for, save for a rather unusual combination of involuted and convoluted black lines and stripes on the cloth's red ground, it seemed to differ in no particular from hundreds of other Oriental tapestries.

Enright must have seen the unspoken skepticism in my face, for the corners of his small hazel eyes wrinkled in amusement.

"Go ahead and laugh," he invited, "but I'll bet you ten dollars that you'll be ready to cry 'nough' by the time you've looked at it steadily for five minutes."

For answer I drew a bill from my pocket and placed it on a tabouret, without taking my eyes from the bit of weaving.

Enright matched my note with one of his, and drew back, smiling whimsically at me through the smoke of his cigar.

"Hand me your ten when the five minutes are up," I ordered, keeping my gaze fixed on the cloth.

"Easy now," he counseled, glancing at his watch; "you've only been looking forty seconds, so far."

One who has never tried it has no conception of how time drags while the eyes are focused on an immovable object. In the quiet of the storeroom I could hear the ticking of Enright's watch distinctly, and the ticks seemed a minute apart. An almost uncontrollable desire to rub my eyes, to shut them, to direct them anywhere but at the cloth, came over me. The writhing broad and narrow black bands on the ruby surface seemed to be slowly coming to life. They wound and twisted, one upon another, like the shadows of scores of snakes suspended in the sunlight. They seemed alternately to advance and retreat upon their glaring resting-place, and my eyes ached with the effort to follow their serpentine movements.

I began to be obsessed with the thought that there really were reptiles—dozens of them, scores of them, hundreds of them—behind me; that they would drop upon me any moment, smearing my body with their loathsome slime, tearing my flesh with their fangs, filling my blood with their deadly venom.

"Time up?" I called, my voice sounding hoarse and croaking in my own ears.

"Only two minutes more to go," Enright answered pleasantly.

"I'll—stick—it—out—if—it—kills me!" I muttered between my teeth, and, covering my eyes with my hands, fell choking and gasping to my knees.

The infernal cloth had won. Scornful and determined as I had been, it had worn my nerves to shreds and made a whimpering, fear-crazed thing of me in three minutes.

"How much will you take for that thing, Enright?" I asked, when I had recovered my composure to some extent.

"More than you're able to give, son," he replied. "I'll get a half-grown fortune from some museum for that bit of fancy work or my name isn't Howard Enright."

"Well," I temporized, "will you rent it to me, then? I'd like to have a modified copy of it made by my paper manufacturer. Some client with a diseased mind might want a chamber of horrors done, and a denatured copy of this cloth would be just the thing."

"Promise me on your honor as a gentleman not to have a duplicate made, and I'll lend it to you for forty-eight hours for nothing," Enright offered.

"Done!" I agreed.

I took the tapestry to my paper-maker this afternoon. I have ordered two rolls of paper made in exact imitation of it. I shall paper the unfinished tower room with it.

THE trap is set. Working at night, and without help, I have hung the walls and ceiling of the tower attic room with the paper. This room is small, hardly more than a large closet, and, being originally intended for a lumber room, is without windows or other communication with the outside except a small fresh-air vent in the roof.

With an idea of obtaining the maximum amount of room for storage purposes, I had dispensed with all wood trim and had the door made flush with the wall. This renders the place ideal for my purpose, for I am able to cover every fractional inch of wall space with the paper; so that, when the door is closed, the maddening design is presented to the gaze from every direction except the floor. This I have painted white, the better

to reflect the glare from the cluster of high-power nitrogen-filled electric lights I have placed in the ceiling.

Early this morning, when I had finally completed my work, I switched on the full force of light and looked about me.

From above, the glare of the electric bulbs beat down like the fires that destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah; from the white floor the reflection smote my eyes like splinters of incandescent metal, and from the walls and ceiling the writhing, tortuous design of the demoniacal paper glared like (to use Enright's description) "an X-ray of a guilty conscience."

I had been careful to leave the door open when I tried my experiment. Lucky for me I did; for I had scarcely glanced once round the hideous apartment when I began to feel the same panic fear I had experienced when I first looked at the cloth in Enright's store. My eyes seemed bulging from their sockets; my breath came hot and quick, like the breath of a sleeper bound fast in a nightmare, and I all but lost my sense of direction. It was with great effort that I found the open door and staggered through it, with the sweat of mortal terror standing on my forehead.

I have been very good to Edith these last few days. I have endeavored to anticipate her every wish; have come back from the city loaded with bonbons and flowers like a country bumpkin wooing his sweetheart; I have doubled her allowance of spending money.

Last evening, after dinner, she kissed me, of her own volition. I felt my plan for vengeance weaken a little as her arms went round my neck. . . . Fool! Her lips are soiled with another man's kisses; her arms are tainted with the embraces of her paramour.

I looked into her eyes, warm and brown and bright, and wondered how often they had shone with love of Fuller. How long, I wondered, had it been since the same arm which rested on my shoulder had clasped the neck of the man who called himself my friend—and stole my honor like a common thief?

I shall invite Fuller to the house to spend the week-end. My trap is set; now to snare the quarry.

It is done.

Last week I mentioned casually to Edith that I had asked Fuller up for the week-end. I saw her eyes brighten at the suggestion, but chose to misinterpret the sign.

"It's no use making a fuss about it," I told her. "I know you don't like him; but I want him here, so you might just as well make the best of it."

She made no reply, simply rose and left the room. As a play-actor Edith is a sad failure. I suppose she feared her joy would be too apparent, even to a doting fool husband, if she remained.

When Fuller came I made a great show of urging her to be courteous to him, and greeted him cordially myself.

Fuller's was a charming personality. Quick-witted, loquacious, well read and much traveled, he was an ideal guest, providing his own and his host's entertainment. We passed a pleasant afternoon together.

I never saw Edith more charming than at dinner that night. There was a faint flush in her face, her eyes were very bright. She was wearing a gown of silver over sapphire, and had a jasmine blossom pinned in the smooth coils of her chocolate-colored hair.

The corners of my mouth flexed grimly at sight of the flower. Once, when I was in South America, I had seen a vicious knife duel between two men, and when I asked the cause of the brawl, I was told that one had offered the other's sister a jasmine bloom. Jasmine, they explained, was the symbol of inconstancy. Strange,

that of all the flowers in my grounds and conservatory Edith should have chosen the badge of infidelity to wear that night!

From my seat at the head of the table I could see Fuller worshiping Edith with his eyes. There was that in his adoring gaze which gave one to think of a mediæval knight kneeling humbly at his fair lady's feet, while her husband was off to the crusades.

We had coffee in the music room. Edith seemed ill at ease, fumbling with her cup, twirling the stem of her liqueur glass between her fingers, toying nervously with her cigarette. Before Fuller and I had finished, she rose abruptly and went to the piano.

There was no light burning in the room, and the moon laid a path of mother-of-pearl across the polished floor. With the silver radiance of the moonlight on the silver meshes of her gown, Edith was white as a wraith of the night. A snatch from Oscar Wilde's *Salome* flashed through my mind:

> She is like a dead woman; a dead woman who covers herself with a veil and goes seeking for lovers.

I smiled to myself in the darkness. "She will seek no more after to-night," I reflected.

> "Ah, moon of my delight, that know'st no wane,
> The moon of heav'n is rising once again;
> How oft hereafter rising shall she look
> Through this same garden after one—in vain?"

she sang. I rose and began to pace the room.

Gradually, taking great pains to be impersonal about it, I swung the conversation to stories of vengeance wreaked by outraged husbands on faithless wives and their paramours. Incidentally, I recounted the legend of the cloth of madness; how the Indian prince had demanded his treacherous friends' sanity as the price of their perfidy.

Edith's hands fluttered among the sheets of music on the piano; a leaf of it fell to the floor. Fuller leaped gallantly to his feet to retrieve it for her, and their hands came together in the moonlight. I saw his fingers close round hers and give them a reassuring pressure.

"What would you do, Alvarde, if you caught another man trespassing on your wife's affections?" Fuller suddenly shot at me. "Kill him?"

Edith gave a short little choking gasp and put her hand to her throat very suddenly. She had always been afraid of me.

"My dear man," I drawled, "do I look like such a fool?"

"Fool?" he echoed wonderingly.

"Precisely; 'fool' is what I said. Why should I hang for another man's sin? I rather think the old raja's method of revenge would appeal to me."

"But, you know," he objected, "the cloth of madness is only a myth."

"So is my wife's incontinence," I answered shortly. "One is quite as possible as the other."

And so we let the talk of betrayed friendship and its price drop, and passed to a discussion of interior decorations.

I told them of my more unusual bits of work for a while, then suggested:

"Let's go to the tower rooms. I've evolved a new scheme in wall-hangings for them. One of the rooms especially will interest you two."

We went through the larger rooms, I pointing out the novelties in color scheme, pattern and wood trim, they taking only a perfunctory interest in my designs.

At the door of the storeroom I stood aside to let them pass. Edith paused at the threshold, looking questioningly, fearfully, into the velvety darkness of the little chamber. Fuller stepped before her.

"Let me go first," he said; "it's dark in there."

"Yes," I echoed, all the smoldering resentment I had felt for months

flaming up in my voice, "it is dark in there, but"—my words rose nearly to a shriek—"we'll lighten it."

I put out my hand, pushing Edith roughly through the doorway after Fuller, slammed the door, locked it, and pressed the switch which controlled the electric lights. Then I bent listening at the keyhole.

For the space of a long breath all was silent in the little room; then there was a deep-drawn sigh, whether from Edith or Fuller I could not say.

"Well, what's next?" I heard him ask. "If this is Jamison's idea of a joke, I think he's showing mighty poor taste."

An insane desire to chuckle came over me. They'd see, very soon, whether I was joking. I wanted to pound on the door; to shout aloud and bid them look about them; to tell them what lay in store.

"Hector," it was Edith speaking in a still, frightened whisper, "he *knew!*"

Fuller's steps sounded harshly on the bare, polished floor of the empty room as he strode about it, seeking an exit; his fists pounded the walls in search of the hidden door. I had to stifle the laughter in my throat; for I knew how the rounded walls, the unbroken monotony of the crimson and black paper, and the glaring reflection from the white floor would confound his sense of direction. He was pacing the room like a blind, caged beast, striking the walls again and again in the same place, and meeting with no more success than an imprisoned bumble-bee flying at the transparent walls of a poison-jar.

For several minutes he continued his futile efforts; then I heard him withdraw to the center of the room.

There was a faint rustle of skirts. She was shrinking up against him.

"She's in his arms, now," I muttered. "Let her cling to him; let him hold her. I wish them joy of each other."

Several minutes more. Then:

"Hector, I'm afraid; I'm terrified. Hold me close, dear."

I bit my lips. Would that devil's design on the walls never begin to work?

"Hector," this time the words came quaveringly, as though she were fighting back a chill, "that paper on the wall—does it seem to you as if the figures on it were moving?"

"Yes, dear."

"They are like snakes—like horrible twisting snakes. I feel as though they were going to spring at me from the walls."

"A-a-h!" I murmured to myself, rubbing my hands together softly, like one who has won a wager. "They're beginning to notice now."

Fuller took several quick, decided steps from the room's center, walking directly toward the door. I drew back and seized a chair, ready to strike him down if he succeeded in breaking through the light wooden frame. I had not counted on his retaining his faculties so long, and had taken no precautions to reinforce the lock, trusting the paper with which it was covered to mask the door effectively.

Within a foot or so of the door he paused irresolutely, waited a moment, and retreated.

"I can't do it!" he almost wailed. "I can't bear to put my hands against that wall!"

"Hector!" This time there was no mistaking the panic in Edith's voice; every word came with a gasp. "The paper—the paper on the wall; it—it's—the—cloth—of—madness! It's that awful tapestry he told us about tonight."

"My God, girl," his reply came thickly, as though his tongue were swollen in his mouth, "you're right!"

I could hear them breathing heavily, like spent runners after a race, or those in the presence of mortal danger.

Softly, there came the sound of Edith's sobbing. Very low it was,

and very pitiful, like the disconsolate heart-broken sobbing of a little child who has lost its mother, and is afraid.

"Oh!" she whimpered, "let me hide my face against you, dear. Don't let me look at those ghastly things on the walls. You must shut your eyes, too, dear; you must not look either."

I waited patiently outside the door. Even closed eyes, I knew, could not withstand the intense glare of those lights and the fascination of those flame-colored walls.

Her resolution broke even sooner than I had expected.

"I can't bear the darkness," she wailed. "I must look, I must see them—the horrible snakes, the hideous snakes that are beckoning to me from the walls. Hold me, Hector darling; don't let me move—don't let me go to them! Hold me fast in your arms."

Another pause. Dimly I caught another noise—one that I had not heard before. Sharp and syncopated it was, like the clicking of castanets heard from a distance. It puzzled me at first; then recognition burst upon me, and I had to thrust my tongue against my teeth to keep from laughing aloud. It was a sound I'd heard on very cold nights when I'd passed shivering newsboys filching a little heat from above some engine-room grating. It was the sound of chattering teeth.

It was warm that night; the temperature in that little, poorly ventilated room, with those great lights burning in it, must have been like the entrance to Avernus; yet their teeth were chattering like a monk's clap-dish. Stark, freezing terror had them by the throats.

I was striding softly across the floor, digging my nails into my palms in an effort to keep from giving audible vent to my feeling of triumph, when my steps were arrested by a titter from the room beyond. Edith was laughing, not mirthfully, but with the shrill cachinnation of hysteria. In a moment her quavering treble was seconded by a deep, masculine baritone. The pair of them were laughing in concert, and from the cracking strain in their voices I knew that they were trying with all their strength to keep silence, yet laughed the harder as they strove.

I turned on my heel and descended to the dining-room. No need to listen further, I knew. A few hours more, at most, and my revenge would be complete. I was shivering a little, myself.

Downstairs, I poured out a stiff peg of Scotch. Raising my glass I looked out into the moonlight, apostrophizing the old raja who invented the cloth of madness.

"Here's to you, brother!" I said as I turned my glass bottom up.

Shortly after midnight I climbed the stairs to the tower and stopped before the door of the little room where I left them. I listened intently for a minute. There was no more sound from beyond the door than if it had barred the entrance to a tomb.

I pressed the electric switch, reducing the force of the lights within by half, then unlocked the door and opened it a crack, peering through the narrow opening.

Inside, everything was still, still as a nursery at midnight.

Fuller was sitting upright in the middle of the floor, an inane smirk overspreading his face. His collar and tie were undone, his waistcoat was unbuttoned, his shirt-front was partly loosened from its studs, and much wrinkled. His tongue protruded from his mouth, hanging flaccidly over his lower lip, as though he had lost control of it. Altogether, he was a figure of comic tragedy, like that character of Victor Hugo's whose face had been so horribly deformed in childhood that, no matter what his emotion was, he could do nothing but grin.

Nearer the door, just as she had fallen, lay Edith. One arm was ex-

tended, the hand resting palm up on the floor, the fingers slightly curled, like a sleeping child's. Her cheek lay pillowed on her arms. Her hair was a little disarranged and the jasmine flower had fallen from it. One of her satin pumps had dropped off and lay gaping emptily beside her, exposing her narrow, silk-cased foot. I could see the veins of her instep showing blue against the white flesh under her silver-tissue stocking. Her lips were parted very slightly.

The air of the place was heavy with the perfume of lily of the valley.

I gathered her in my arms, and she whimpered a little, like a child that is disturbed in its sleep, as I carried her down to her room.

It was difficult business disrobing her and getting her into bed, for she seemed to have lost all control of her muscles, even being unable to take the pins from her hair.

Fuller was a heavy man, but somehow I managed to drag him downstairs and tumble him into bed, being careful to scatter his clothes about the room as was his custom when turning in late.

Last of all I returned to the tower and worked like a fiend, obliterating every trace of the wall-paper's design with the gray paint I had hidden away for that purpose. Two hours' heart-breaking work, and the little room was as demure in its fresh coating of Quaker drab as a nun's cell. A neat, well-lighted storeroom it was, nothing more. Every lingering sign of the cloth of madness was hidden away forever.

I slept well into the morning next day, rousing only when Grigsby came rushing into my room and shook me roughly by the shoulder.

"Mr. Alvarde, sir," he panted, his eyes bulging from his face like a terrified frog's, "something terrible has happened, sir!"

"What's the matter?" I growled at him sleepily. "Cook gone on a strike?"

"Oh, no, sir, no!" He wrung his hands together in anguish. "It's really terrible, sir! Mr. Fuller's a-sittin' on the edge of his bed, a-tryin' to put both feet into one leg of his trousers, sir, and he's smilin' something awful." And Grigsby attempted to twist his heavy features into an imitation of Fuller's demented grin.

I got into my slippers and robe and started across the hall for Fuller's room, running full tilt into Agnes, the waitress. When Edith had failed to come down long after her usual breakfast hour, Agnes had gone upstairs to see what was detaining her, and had come running to me, fear written in every line of her face.

"Oh, sir, something's wrong with Mrs. Alvarde! I went in to call her, and she wouldn't answer me, nor look at me, nor nothing; just lies there and laughs and mumbles at herself, like she was a baby!"

"You're a pair of fools," I told her and Grigsby. "You stay here; I'll go and see for myself."

It was true. Fuller was as perfect an imbecile as was ever confined in an asylum, and Edith's mental timepiece had been turned back thirty-five years. No babe in arms was ever more helpless in body and mind than she.

The papers and the doctors and the neighbors made a great fuss about it. Everyone sympathized with my unfortunate wife and friend and wondered how I could stand my terrible misfortune with such fortitude. I closed the house and sold it at a loss several months later.

Edith is still at a sanatorium, and the physicians look sorrowfully at me when I go out to visit her, and tell me that she will never be anything but a grown-up infant, though she will probably live to a ripe old age.

Fuller's malady has taken a turn for the worse. Last month they had

to restrain him with a strait-jacket. He was raving about some strange kind of cloth—what it was they couldn't make out—and threatening to kill me: me, his best and oldest friend!

"Let me go first, it's dark in there!" Fuller said when he and Edith stood at the entrance of the storeroom. I've often wondered which one of them went into the darkness of insanity first. Edith, I imagine; women have no control of their emotions.

I AM a sick man. The physician tells me that there's nothing to worry about, but I read my death sentence in his eyes. If there's such a place as the hell the preachers tell of, I suppose I'll go there. At least, I'll have to die to do it; Edith and Fuller got theirs here, and it will last through all the long years they live like brute beasts in their madhouse cells.

* * * * * * *

JAMISON ALVARDE'S attorney closed the little black book with a snap and pursed his lips. Anyone looking at him would have said that he was about to whistle.

"Yes," he said meditatively, tapping his knee with the little book, "if there's a hell he's undoubtedly there now! It's a pity if he isn't. This scheme of things certainly seems to require a hell—a good hot one, too!"

The Haunted House

By CRISTEL HASTINGS

It stands deserted through the mildewed years;
Its only friends the wind and evening star
And the gray mist that rains its dripping tears
And wonders who its ghostly tenants are.

They say it's best to take the upper trail
Where sunshine floods the flowered, perfumed way,
Avoiding an old road where thistles sail
And blank-eyed windows stare back, gaunt and gray.

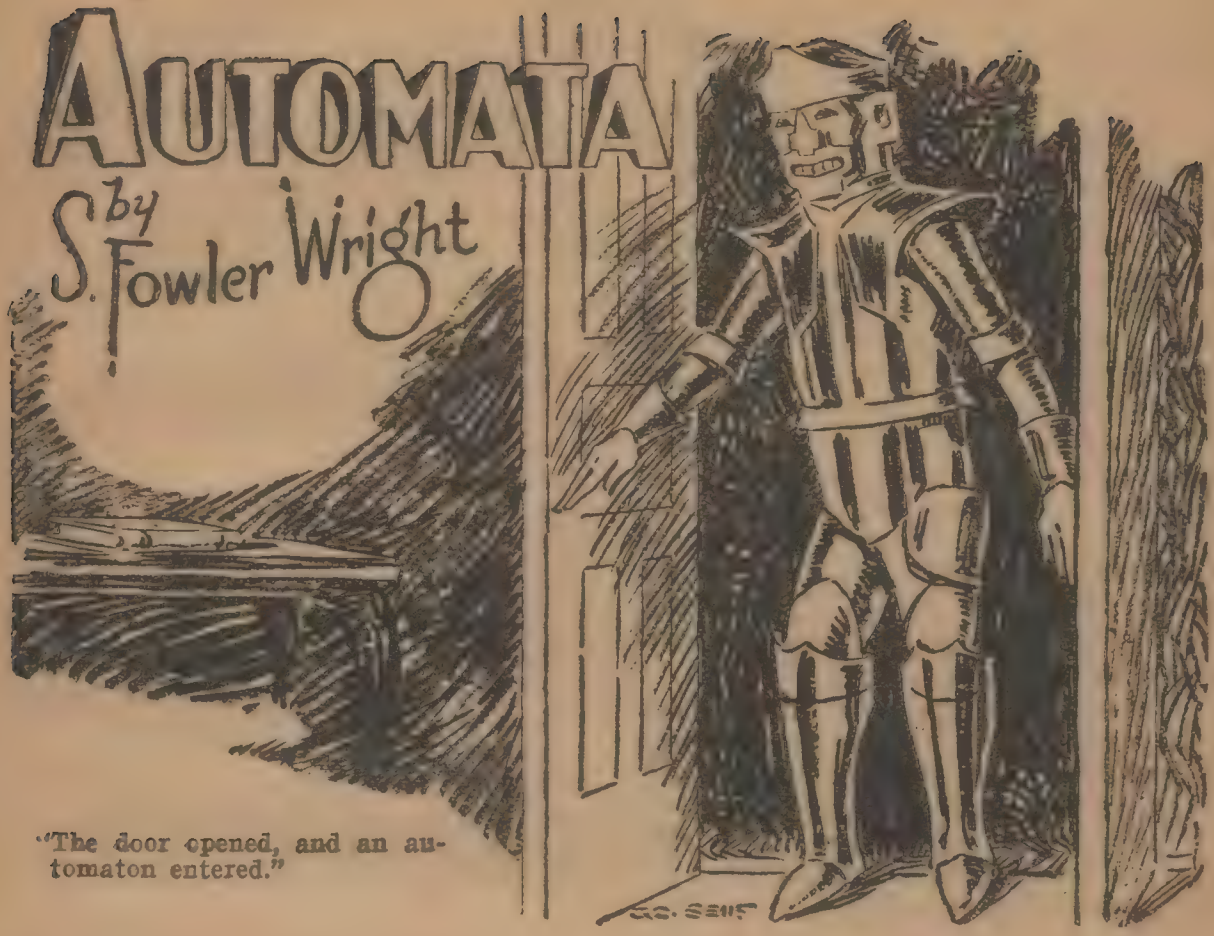
They say the walls have bullet-tunneled holes,
And that the rats run screeching through the night;
They say queer shapes slip out and walk the knolls,
Seeking the souls that long ago took flight.

Queer lights glow where the zero hour sounds,
And winds moan through the empty, aching halls;
And as they bend the trees, a shadow bounds
From room to room, and sends its shrieking calls.

Forgotten with each dawn the moaning croon,
The screeching rats, the shadow shapes that strode;
But if I *must* go by, even at noon,
It's just as well to take the upper road.

AUTOMATA

by S. Fowler Wright



"The door opened, and an automaton entered."

THE annual meeting of the British Association was being held at Sheffield, and the learned members were assembled to hear the presidential address of Dr. Tilwin, who had shaken the foundations of scientific complacency at the Brighton gathering of the previous year, by a casual allusion to "the two obvious fallacies in the theory of relativity."

He was too eminent a mathematician to be disregarded and the scientific world had waited impatiently for a justification of that audacious challenge, which had appeared only a few weeks earlier, and concerning which none of the nine persons in England who professed (rightly or not) to understand the assaulted theory had yet ventured an opinion.

Now it was hoped that the new president would use the occasion for a further elucidation of the startling heresy which he had put forward. Were they to be persuaded back to the childish levels of Newton, or led to unimagined heights of mathematical complexity?

Even the popular belief that two and two make four might not be left unchallenged. All that is certainly known is that they have done so very frequently. The rule is not therefore proved to be invariable, nor, could it be shown that it has been so in the past, would it be a logical consequence that it must be always so in the future.

But Dr. Tilwin made no further assault upon Einstein's incomprehensible stronghold.

He commenced, instead, to direct the attention of his audience to the results of modern scientific discoveries as they had materialized themselves in the changed conditions of human life, and then, more specifically, as

they had developed the instruments of production and labor, first substituting inorganic for organic sources of energy, and then inorganic for organic media for its practical implement.

The assembly listened at first with a somewhat tepid interest. They understood that the age of machinery was being eulogized, as an almost necessary compliment to the occupations of the city in which they met, and they expected that the address would pass on to other more disputable or fruitful fields, but they stirred themselves with a quickened observation as their president continued to develop the topic he had commenced, and to conduct it, with unemotional logic, to its somber end.

"The earlier inventors of mechanical apparatus," he was now saying, "asserted confidently that their advantages to mankind would result in an increase of population, and this fallacy was supported for a time by the fact that large numbers were enabled to congregate in centers around which there was no sufficient area of fertile land to feed them.

"Yet, even then, the writing was on the wall. Around these urban areas stretched mile after mile of green countryside on which a healthy peasantry shrank and dwindled as the powers of steam and petrol were substituted for that of human muscles. Gone were the merry crowds of the English hayfields, and the dead hands that had wielded the harvest-sickle had no descendants.

"When it was found that the few who were left could not, under the new conditions, grow the food which was their only merchandise, in successful competition with the supplies of distant lands, their countrymen were indifferent. Let them starve or cease. War brought famine, and there was a short-lived reaction. Then the spectacle of a race destroying its most virile elements for a delusion of profit was resumed and the declension continued.

"It is true that the rapid disappearance of the horse was observed as a direct consequence of the substitution of inorganic for organic energy, but its significance was disregarded.

"Even today, there may be few of us who have realized that it is not the horse alone which is destined to disappear before the advance of a higher energistic form, that we ourselves in a few generations—probably in a very few generations—are destined to follow. . . . Yet the process of our destruction has commenced already.

"It is true that fears have been expressed lest the advance of knowledge should provide us with explosive substances, with bacterial cultures, or vaporous poisons, by which we might contrive our own annihilation. But it is difficult to suppose that an overruling Providence would permit our disappearance before we have fulfilled the high destiny of our evolution, and have occupied the earth with such a race of automata as will continue to function and to develop,—to what ends we can only dimly imagine,—without the need of our continued service.

" . . . I have said that the process of our destruction has commenced already. Already Nature, working in her kindly, gradual ways, is preparing us to face not individual, but racial extinction without excessive protest, or too-keen regret. The old ideal of the home is fading. The old superstition of the value or necessity of children is leaving, if it have not already left, our minds.

"Our fathers thought no shame to let the plow-horse die, finding that the power of steam could be successfully substituted for a creature which had the pains and pleasures, the impulses and imperfections, of a sentient life. Our children think no shame to say that they will have a child less that they may have an auto-car the more.

Some of the machines that we have designed already are employed in manufacturing appliances to frustrate the natural fertility of the race.

"The day of the substitution of the machine for the human body is not a vision of the future, a speculation of the philosopher. It is already upon us.

" . . . It is the control of motion which has first betrayed us. We constructed machines which would move our possessions. Then our machines commenced to manufacture others which were adapted to move ourselves. The population of the machines has increased until they can be counted in millions; we are content to climb into them, and to be moved backwards and forwards continually, as gnats whirl in the sun.

" . . . But, as yet, we may observe with some satisfaction that they are dependent upon our service. They can not move unless we put the food into their bellies, and we can stop or turn them with a motion of our hand.

"Yet how long can this balance of power continue? How long shall we be able to observe this pause of uncertainty, during which it may be hard to say whether the man exists for the machine, or the machine for the man?

"Already the tide is on the turn.

"It is not only that the automata have been constructed which in clumsy, limited ways can perform some human actions, or produce some vocal sounds.

"It is more significant that the number of men who are employed in every factory decreases as its machines become more numerous.

"The capstan lathe may require a workman's individual attention. The automatic lathe is capable of a great variety of independent operations, and a team of these, industriously occupied, may be content with the menial service of a single attendant.

"The humility of science will hesitate to prophesy the detailed incidence of that which may be seen in its inevitable outline, but it may not be a too-rash guess that the industrial workman and the domestic servant will be the first to disappear from their places in the national life. Some few may remain for generations, even for centuries. But is it reasonable to suppose that the nation will continue altruistically to support the persons and families of industrial workers who are no longer needed? For themselves, there may be some generous provision to avert the euthanasia which would be the evident economic expedient for the aged horse, or the dog of which a woman has grown tired, but would it be tolerable that we should allow the propagation of their useless children?

"Or consider, how many would there be who would continue the employment of the domestic servant, idle, wasteful, dirty and unreliable as they too often are, merely that the population might not diminish, when there would be automatic substitutes available, which would not only be free from such faults, but would require no "evenings out", no annual increase of wages, and could be put away if the house were closed, without requiring the continued supply of food or fuel?" . . .

At this point Sir Ireton Mount looked at the illustrious author of Sheerluck Soames, who was seated beside him. They shook their massive heads in a troubled wonder. Their colossal intellects told them that such developments were logical enough. But why had the spirits given no hint to their faithful servants? They went out to consult Pheneas.

2

Bellorina was a woman of a weak sentimentality, which had caused her to expand the free allotment of seventeen units of energy, which was the maturity-portion which every woman of the community was entitled to claim on allocation, in the erection

of a personal home, modeled on the expiring traditions of the aborigines of the Twentieth Century. It was built of oblong red bricks, with a tiled and sloping roof. Its rooms were of irregular sizes, and were disfigured by many ingle-nooks, "exposed" oak beams, and the remains of a bread-oven. It had a feeding-table, and quaint crockery utensils, instead of the usual nutrition-pumps. Even the automata which waited upon her were of the oldest patterns, finished in imitation of the living maid-servants of that remote period to which her mind reverted. The outside of the house was patched with flowers and shorn grass, and groups of senseless and insanitary trees. Appropriately enough, after what she knew to be the way of the ultra-esthetic Georgians, she had called it Daisy Villa.

Today, Bellorina had invited three female acquaintances, who, like herself, were not on the mating-list of the week, to join her at an "afternoon tea" so that the illusion of savagery might be completely realized.

They were all allocated women, with a full knowledge of life, and sure to talk freely and scandalously when they got together.

Bora-Ann came a few minutes before the others, as the dignity of her suffix required, and waited without complaint when the door (which should have opened in response to the secret word of invitation in F sharp) remained closed till she pressed the push, and an automaton, dressed in black with a white apron and cap, had promptly responded.

She did not falter in her courteous approbation, even when a child, with the appearance of a girl of five or six years, met her in the hall, and held out a timid hand, saying, "Good afternoon, Mrs. Bora-Ann," in a gay Georgian voice. She did not know what the "Mrs." meant, for the folly of studying past history was no longer general, but she understood that this was the sort of thing which was supposed to happen in the old barbarous days, and she stooped good-humoredly for the small lifted arms to go round her neck, and kissed the soft cheek kindly.

The queer little room was windowed, but a loggia reduced its light, and an obsolete electric bulb glowed from the ceiling, for it was winter twilight without. The corners of the room were in shadow, and Bora-Ann, who had never known an actual darkness, controlled her fear with some difficulty, as she fitted herself, with commendable agility, into the wicker-chair which her hostess indicated for her reception.

"How sweet everything is!" she said kindly; "it was almost like a real flesh-child in the hall. . . . " Then her voice changed to a half-fearful excited note, as the thought came, "*It wasn't a real flesh-child, was it?*"

The question remained unanswered for a moment, for Mira and Scarletta came in together, and chairs had to be drawn out, and their uses indicated; then Bellorina answered, with a laugh which was not free from embarrassment, "Oh, no; I'm not quite so mad as that. . . . Not in the hall, anyway. You couldn't tell what would happen. . . . But it's a very good imitation. I've got two, really. They can say almost anything, and are never seriously disobedient. They oil themselves, and charge each other's batteries at bedtime. They're really no trouble at all."

"I was speaking to someone yesterday," said Mira, who was always indefinite as to her sources of information, "who told me that the man she had last week told her that he had had a woman the week before who told him that she knew a woman,—I can't be sure, but I believe it's that blue-banded scratchcat at Pity Rise. It couldn't be anyone else in our country. They say she's so coarse that she had the same man twice in one year when the lists were altered,—I told Biltie last night that I'm sure it's

she, and Biltie told Agra-Ann this morning that he knows it for a fact,—who had a flesh-child five years ago, and the woman said she believes it's still there."

"I daresay it's true enough," said Scarletta, hopefully. "They say that flesh-children are almost common in some parts of Italy. I don't think that anyone has more than one, and, of course, they have two or three automata for them to play with. But it's an endless trouble to all concerned. Flesh-children are dirty things, and they won't keep the same size, and sometimes they die altogether. They say you can't imagine what has to be done for them the first year or so, to keep them going at all. I suppose there have to be a few somewhere, but it's hard to think that a decent woman should have one."

"It isn't only the coarseness of it," Mira answered. "It's difficult to understand any woman being so silly. The automata make each other so well now, that there's no excuse for anyone messing with a flesh-child. Since the mathematicians perfected the law of the Automatic Balance of Deviation——"

"I don't understand mathematics," her hostess interposed, "and I know Scarletta hates them. Of course, Bora-Ann"—she smiled deferentially at the woman whose suffix placed her among the intellectual aristocracy of her time—"but there isn't any real need for us humans to worry about such things now, is there? Sartie told me that the automata can work out problems that no man could possibly even attempt. He says it's because they're not distracted with feelings and jealousies, and help each other instead of quarreling. And they don't get tired, and make mistakes. Sartie says we shan't be needed much longer, even to make them. . . . Of course, evolution's right enough, and I know I'm silly, but it all seems rather dreadful to me. I wish I'd got a body that lasts, or could have a new valve when the old one wears out. And—I know you'll laugh at me, but I almost wish I'd got a flesh-child, or even two. The automata are both very sweet and loving, and they're no trouble at all, but it must be rather fun to watch them change as they grow,—and—to comfort them when they cry."

Bora-Ann moved uneasily. She was a guest, and she would be sorry to hear anything which might involve report and repression. She resisted an inclination to change the subject. She felt that it would be cowardly to do so. Such a position should be handled kindly, but firmly.

"I don't think," she answered, "that you quite realize what you say. The unhealthy atmosphere in which we are sitting may go far to explain it. But you are right that the automata can solve problems which are far beyond the capacity of the human mind, and some of the newest are so constructed that they can themselves design any machine which is needed to carry out their own conceptions. . . . There is a difference between the greatest man and the simplest machine which can never be bridged, and our highest wisdom is to observe it with reverence and humility. It is not a difference in degree, but in kind. We act from confused and contradictory impulses, but they act with the inevitability of universal law. In a word, we are human, and they are divine."

She made the sacred sign as she said it, and observed with satisfaction that the hand of her hostess was lifted also. It was, at least, no house of open blasphemy into which she had entered. . . . But she resolved that a suggestion which she had intended to make should remain unspoken. It had been calculated that twenty human attendants would be required by their masters for certain menial offices in the next generation, for which provision had not yet been made, and she had been commissioned to obtain

twenty women volunteers to produce them. She had thought of Bellorina at once as one who would be less likely than most of her acquaintances to resent the indignity of such a proposal. But she was a woman of religious mind, and she saw that Bellorina was morally unfit for such a motherhood. She turned the subject adroitly by remarking that the Bliskie trial would commence on Tuesday.

"I don't believe he did it on purpose," Scarletta started at once. "I think it's a shame to try him. I know I should make mistakes continually."

"It was bad enough for Corinna, anyway," said Mira; "you can't expect her not to complain. If you were put into the wrong operating-machine, and found you'd left half your thyroid behind when you only wanted a cancer taken out of your liver——"

"Well, he says he forgot the numbers of the machine for a moment. He'd never made a mistake before in over twenty years," Scarletta persisted.

"But you know they say that he'd quarreled with Corinna the week before, and she said she knew he'd play her some trick before she entered," Bellorina felt it only fair to remind her.

"It all shows the importance of eliminating the human element," said Bora-Ann, who saw it to be a lesson which her companions needed. "A machine is not merely incapable of a spiteful action, it is so far above it that the very suspicion would be an absurdity; nor could it make such a mistake as the man suggests in his own defense,—if such it can be called. To my mind it condemns him more utterly than if he admitted the accusation. But I believe that a proper automaton is already being designed to replace him, so that we need have no fear for ourselves in future."

Bellorina sighed silently. She knew that it was wrong to doubt, and she was really sorry for the misadventure of Corinna's thyroid. She realized the defects of her race. If only she had the intellect of Bora-Ann, no doubt it would be easier to believe. . . . After all, she had the prettiest hair in the Thames valley, or so Gartie had told her. . . . And Gartie would be hers for a week from next Tuesday. . . . In the end, what matters?

. . . She became aware that her thoughts had wandered, and her guests were rising. "Must you really go?" she was saying.

It may be that nothing does.

3

The last—the nameless last—of a dying race, the man sat before his drawing-board, idly fingering his compasses, forgetful of the uncompleted task which the overseer had set him, while his aging mind went backward.

He might be the last of his kind . . . he knew that it was a sign of weakness to regret it. The fact that his mind was wandering now was a sign of his inferiority to the busy mechanisms around him. His mind was lawless and unstable in a universe in which law and order were supreme and final.

There were some men who had seen this, even in the crude beginnings of the age of machinery. They had taught that everything is controlled at last by Natural Laws which are both blind and inflexible.

Men had foolishly imagined an ultimate supremacy of their own blundering bodies;—even, in their incredible egotism, they had postulated an anthropomorphic God.

Yet, in a universe where law and order rule, the precision of the machine—even of the earliest and crudest constructions — must have been superior — in greater harmony with their environment—than were bodies so clumsily constructed that they can not be trusted to repeat the simplest operations with exactitude of time or movement. Bodies easy to break, difficult to control or repair.

Dimly they had seen, even then, in a universe which is itself a machine, working by mathematical, unchanging law, the absurdity of an emotional anthropomorphic God.

Yet they had not seen far ahead, at the first.

The steam-plow came, and the petrol-drawn car, and the horse died out to make place for these mechanisms. Few men had realized that the doom of their own race was logically foreshadowed, and that nothing could save them but a war sufficiently disastrous to destroy the world's machinery and the conditions which could produce it.

But such wars as came had only resulted in the subjection of the backward tribes who had not learnt the new worship. The industrial worker had disappeared before the pressure of economic law; the domestic servant before the dictates of fashion.

Even in the earliest days the new worship had been established, although it was not then recognized that a new and higher faith had superseded the old superstitions. When the new Moloch called for blood-sacrifice it had been paid without protest or regret, though it would not have been easily satisfied. It sucked blood very greedily, not of single sacrifices as on the Hittite altars of old, but the blood of thousands. When it was thought (in error) that a system of one-way traffic might be conducive to its speed and comfort, the blood of an extra hundred of Londoners had not been grudged to the trial, though their deaths had been foreseen and forecalculated.

Ships had already been manipulated without crews, and airplanes controlled without pilots, and where the helmsmen had gone the chauffeur had very quickly followed.

Of course there had been anger—protest — rebellion. There had been populations, particularly in some of the old urban areas, that had persisted in the production of useless insanitary children. But such revolts had been futile. The machines had been invincible, and the men who fought beside them had shared their triumph. Even those early machines, directed and controlled by the men who made them, had been irresistible. They had not cried out when they were hurt, they had not slept when on duty. They belonged to a higher natural order than mankind.

. . . Soon it would be a world of machines from which the memory of mankind had died. He did not know that he was the last man living. How should he? But he knew that the last of human births was behind him.

A world of machines—to his feeble, futile brain it seemed lacking in purpose. Yet he knew, as his ancestors had perceived, that the universe is without consciousness. Scientists had realized, even then, that sentient life is a sporadic outbreak, which, if it have ever occurred, or will do so, elsewhere is almost incredibly remote and occasional, a mere outbreak of cheese-mites, a speck of irritation, a moment's skin-disease on the healthy body of a universe of never-changing law.

. . . He remembered the Crawlers. They had been no larger than a man. Their smooth skins had been impenetrable to anything less than a high-explosive shell. Their mandibles were a 20 H. P. vise, yet so softly padded, so gradual in operation, that they could be trusted to strangle the throat they seized without breaking the skin, and to loose it when pulsation ceased, and they fulfilled their purpose. A dozen of these let loose in the rebellious slums had soon checked their foolish fecundity. Then there had been—but his mind turned from the thought. They had been rather horrible in their operations;—but effectual, as machines are.

The hypnotic method by which the Eastern races had been led to destroy themselves to the accompaniment of their own laughter had been a pleasanter thing to watch.

Deus ex machina,—the human race has always had a subconscious knowledge of its own deficiency. It was shown in their clumsy efforts at patterning: in their desire for repetitions of any kind: by the way in which they would snap and worry at anyone who deviated in word or garment: or in the stubborn continuation of a custom after need and meaning had left it.

But the time of rebellion had passed, and resignation had followed. Resignation,—and worship.

Worship had been gradual in its growth, but inevitable. Even in the early days of the Twentieth Century man had stood in silent adoration around the machines that had self-produced a newspaper or a needle. . . . And at that time they could no more have conceived what was to follow than the first ape that drew the sheltering branches together could foresee the dim magnificence of a cathedral dome. But even then they were displacing the anthropomorphic God, and preparing for the occupation of a vacant throne. . . .

He wakened guiltily from his wandering thoughts as the bell rang that announced the coming of the messenger that would collect the work of the day. . . . Only five of the six drawings were ready. He did not know what would follow. Would they scrap him in the consequence? He knew that he had been quite safe so long as he had been regular in his habits, and exact in his work.

It was all law now,—blind law. No emotion — no injustice: no caprice. Had the intricate evolutions of self-designing machinery provided for this unprecedented failure?

He became aware that the collector was standing beside him. It would not wait. Starting hurriedly, he dropped the folded sheets into the slot that opened to take them. One — two — three—four—five.

The collector paused for a moment longer, giving time enough for the sixth sheet to follow. A wild and impious thought leapt into the brain of the delinquent. Might he not drop a blank into the slot? When and how would the error be discovered? What a confusion would result? Had he done so, it may be that the tiny cause would have spread disaster and chaos in that ordered world, and it might have fallen in fragments, to be rebuilt by the patient forces of evolution through the succeeding eons. It is more probable that such a contingency had already been discounted by the inhuman powers which were at work around him. But had he been capable of such an action, he saw, even as he thought it, that it would be impossible. There was no time to fold the empty sheet before the automaton, after a second of human-seeming hesitation, had passed on, and was making its collection from the workers further along the bench.

He knew that he ought to move; he knew that the oiler would be here in a few minutes to caress and comfort the joints and bearings of his companions. Yet he sat still, wondering.

. . . The door opened, and an automaton entered. It was one of those which still bore a vague resemblance to humanity, the pattern of the first designers not having been entirely abandoned. It was thus that the human race might leave the impress of its passing flicker of life for a million years — perhaps for ever — as a mollusk may leave its fossil imprint in the enduring rock. It came quietly up to the nameless relic of the human race, and took his arm in a grip that was sufficient, but without violence.

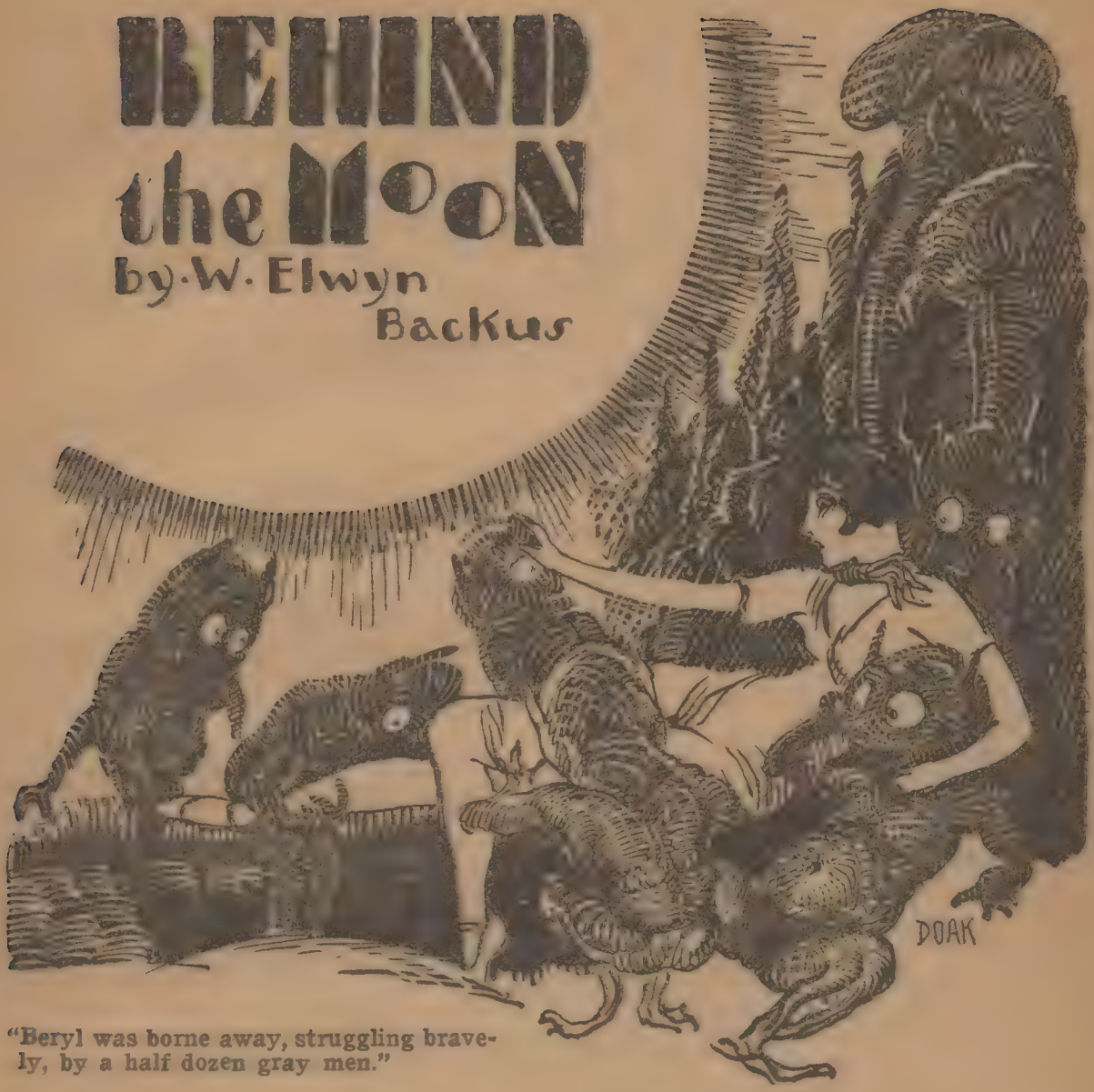
He shuddered inwardly, remembering the fate of those who had rebelled in his early childhood, and who had been given in sacrifice by their fellow-men to the offended deities.

He remembered their screams as they had fallen among the machines that they had blasphemed so foolishly.

But he did not dream of rebellion. Evolution had triumphed. Side by side, they went out together.

BEHIND the MOON

by W. Elwyn Backus



"Beryl was borne away, struggling bravely, by a half dozen gray men."

PROLOGUE

ON THE night of Thursday, August 11, 1938, those who happened to be watching the skies from the Middle West and the East about midnight were startled by a strange and awe-inspiring spectacle; that, apparently, of a meteor "falling" upward—*from* the earth!

Many and weird were the conjectures that appeared in some of the nation's newspapers the next morning. However, it was the *Cincinnati Commercial Tribune* which first supplied the amazing details connected with the affair. The article follows:

SUICIDE PARTY HOPS OFF FOR MOON

DEFY ORDER OF WITHDRAWING PROMOTER

Withdrawal, under adverse public opinion, by the promoter of the Earth-to-Moon hop, and his subsequent order to dismantle the strange device just completed for this amazing attempt to span planetary space, evidently precipitated a pre-schedule leap off Mother Earth by the inventor of the Rocket, Philip Carewe, and those associated with him in a wild scheme of first-hand lunar study and possible colonization.

Attendants at Lunken Airport were aroused last night by an automobile pulling up near the giant Rocket. The latter had been conveyed there for its hop-off. Preparing to investigate, they were just in time to see a gigantic column of flame leap from

the propulsion tubes of this monster machine as it shot skyward.

So great was the impact of the fiery column, that a crater fifty feet in diameter and thirty feet deep was formed in the moist soil, softened by the recent unseasonal rains. The chassis of the automobile was found in the crater, melted into a shapeless mass.

One attendant, Arthur Brockner, 1215 Easter Avenue, was able to describe the spectacle vividly.

"I had just reached the door of the main hangar, a little ahead of the other boys," said Brockner, "when there was a blinding splash of intense white flame on the field, accompanied by a frightful, hissing roar. Simultaneously, a column of fire shot up and into the heavens, its head soaring on and on into space.

"At a height of what I would put at some thirty miles, it bent in its course, heading directly into the path of the moon. All this happened in less than five minutes.

"Fascinated, we continued to watch the Rocket's bright trail until approaching dawn made this invisible."

How many are in the Rocket is a question, though four members of the group pledged to go were missing from their homes. Whether or not they still are alive is another question. It is possible that one or more of them were blotted out, obliterated, by what may have been a premature blast and which destroyed their car. Yet the fact that not the slightest trace of them was found in the crater would seem to indicate that they had departed with the Rocket.

The one member of the original suicide party who did not go, Miss Ruth Hasken, of Milford, Ohio, reports that the others telephoned her late last night and importuned her to join them in their sudden, announced intention of "starting for the moon at once." She declined.

Further movements of the Rocket will be watched through powerful telescopes the world over, each night. As long as the supply of oxyhydrogen lasts in the large central tank with which the Rocket is equipped for its fiery propulsion through space, observers with the larger telescopes should be able to follow its trail anywhere between here and the moon, which is, roughly, some 240,000 miles distant now.

CHAPTER 1

APPARENTLY oblivious to the excitement that possessed his companions was the young man of the fine, gray eyes, who sat staring morosely out across the dimly lighted lawn. A light breeze ruffled his tousled blond hair over an intelligent forehead. About a mouth that plainly was designed to express the even good humor of its owner there now was a certain grim disappointment.

There were four round the table, in the little garden which they were wont to frequent since they had been drawn together in preparation for one of the weirdest adventures the mind of man had yet conceived. Three males and a girl of rather extraordinary charm. The remains of a late repast lay before them.

The strains of a waltz, wafted to them from a hidden orchestra, blended pleasantly with the soft timbre of the girl's voice as she read from the evening's *Times-Star*, though there was indignation in her tones. A becoming flush of vexation colored her rouge-free cheeks, and her large hazel eyes sparkled with mysterious fires.

——is gratifying to learn that Promoter Hanley has at last withdrawn from this criminally impractical venture. It had been hinted by some that, in backing the mad, 24-year-old inventor of the Rocket, Hanley was actuated by a vain desire to further advertise himself and, incidentally of course, the chewing gum known the world over by his name; this at the sacrifice of the lives of these irresponsible young daredevils who would risk practically certain death for a chance at the $500,000 that was to have been theirs if they should succeed. The money was, otherwise, to go to their beneficiaries, and had already been placed in escrow to this end.

Hanley maintains, however, that his prize offer had its inception in a statement by Professor William H. Peterson, of Jamaica, who calculated that an ordinary airplane traveling two hundred miles an hour would reach the moon in about fifty days—assuming, of course, that there were air throughout the intervening distance through which the plane could travel.

It is a fact that the moon is so much nearer to the earth than any other heavenly body, that the naked eye sees it more plainly than the greatest astronomer sees the nearest planet through his high-power telescope. The inventor of the Rocket had planned to leap through the vacuum which an airplane could not travel, and to reduce the airplane-time estimate to approximately one seventh!

The giant Rocket is to be dismantled and scrapped at once.

"Well, 'dare-devil' partners, there goes a glorious chance to convince a globeful of doubters and skeptics," the girl continued. "A great adventure gone wrong!"

The tall, almost too handsome male seated beside her placed a strong, tanned hand over her slim but capable-looking one.

"Never mind, Beryl. Old Mother Earth doesn't provide so bad a place, after all."

But she deftly slipped her fingers free from the grasp of her fiancé, bestowing upon him an enigmatic smile, and addressed him of the tousled locks across the table.

"Cheer up, Phil. Maybe we'd have backed out on you anyway. I know Ruth wasn't any too sure of going; while as for Don over there—her boy friend——"

"I'll vouch for Don any time," replied Phil. "I believe in you all, for that matter—though it's true that Ruth has been wavering. But the rest of you——" An idea appeared to seize him suddenly. "Look here. We *could* best the scoffers yet. The Rocket is completed, as you know—is even fully stocked with provisions and special togs; for, only on the eve, almost, of our departure is our backer afflicted by this safety-first germ bred by a lot of calamity howlers. He's spent his money freely for the Rocket. Now let's give him a run for it anyway, in spite of the pack. We can phone Ruth, arrange to pick her up on the way to the airport, and hop off before anyone has a chance to stop us. What do you say?"

His earnest gaze traveled appraisingly from one to the other of them; from Beryl Claverly, gracefully rounded, petite and brown-haired, a self-reliant, orphaned business girl of twenty-two, whose ability as a stenographer she had hoped to employ to advantage in taking down notes and typing a record of their adventure—if they lived to have any beyond the proposed hop-off into space; to Donald Armstrong, the stocky, sandy-haired, good-natured mechanician, who, oddly enough, had preached to rural congregations before he had decided that mechanical science held greater mysteries for him; and finally to John Sanderson, the stalwart botanist, whose talents had been intended for the study of whatever plant life the earth's satellite might hold. Would they see it through, now that the deed confronted them squarely—a leap into eternity perhaps? The idea left even Philip a little breathless, despite his long planning and the steeling of himself to this unparalleled adventure.

Beryl was the first to speak.

"I'll telephone Ruth," she said, getting up. "But whether she agrees or not to go with us, you can count on me. Yes, I know"—she smiled down Philip's protest about their expecting a lone girl to accompany them—"one poor little girl out there among the cold stars and mere males, and all that; but I'm going just the same. I'm old enough to know my mind and quite as able to take care of myself as any male, thank you. And that's that."

"And you can count on me," quietly put in Donald, his usually smiling, round face more serious than Beryl's.

"How about you, John?"

"Oh—you can count on me, Phil," after a moment's hesitation.

Presently Beryl returned.

"Ruth has reneged, as I half expected. She has absorbed that article in the paper and decided that the idea was all wrong in the first place. I've a suspicion that she may even try to have us stopped, so let's hurry. Leave-takings would merely complicate things—especially for Don. Eh, Don?"

"Well—I think you're right about a sudden leave-taking being best, Beryl," said that individual after a brief, thoughtful pause. "Come on, gang."

CHAPTER 2

AHEAD, the twin beams from the little sedan's headlamps swept the vast landing-field as Philip swung the car skilfully round and brought it to a quick stop.

A few yards away loomed one of the strangest machines ever devised by man, a machine in which these intrepid would-be pioneers of space expected to defy the laws of gravitation, to reach and explore that great expanse of lunar landscape which was turned to earthly view in all phases of its bleak glory once each month; and behind that face, too, where no man's eye had yet seen, even from afar.

Silently they got out and approached the colossal affair, which represented more than a year's construction, and years of dreaming and planning before that. One hundred and forty-two feet high, and thirty feet in diameter, it towered above them with its conical peak outlined against the moon's crescent as if eager to soar away to its destination somewhere in the universe.

"This way," Philip whispered softly, striding toward a narrow ladder of aluminum work whose polished outlines shone in ghostly relief against the black shadows.

Quietly they mounted between the five monster propulsion tubes, on which the Rocket rested, to the manholes which opened through the double floor into the lower chambers; or, rather, into one of the three triangular chambers that occupied the lower section of the Rocket.

Inside, Philip switched on the lights while Donald pulled up the ladder and screwed down the heavy, glass-centered hermetic caps over inner and outer manholes.

"'All ashore, those who are going ashore,' sang out Philip, simulating a sang-froid he was far from feeling. He glanced quickly about at the pale faces of the others, more than half expecting a general protest, even now, that this was carrying a joke too far, and a demand to be let out; such a protest as would likely rout his own wavering determination to see this wild adventure through if he had to go it alone. Beryl's hazel eyes returned his gaze calmly, if a bit widely. Donald's greenish ones watched him speculatively, a hint of humorous appreciation in their depths. Only the countenance of the tall, god-like John Sanderson betrayed a hint of indecision.

"Push off, Captain," said the girl, a slight tremolo in her voice.

"The 'ayes' have it, Phil, old fellow," remarked Donald. "Let's go."

Philip saw John Sanderson take a short step toward him as if to stop him, then halt in apparent indecision. He thought he heard a faint cry from the outside world in that moment of death-like silence inside the Rocket's sealed interior, and wondered whether their attempted departure had already been discovered. Well, it was too late for anyone to interfere now!

"Hold fast, everybody," he called grimly, glancing around once more to see that each one had gripped the heavy rungs provided for the start, each rung an integral part of a sliding section of the wall and floor, hydraulically balanced to absorb the major part of the shock of starting. Standing on the similarly balanced platform by the controls, he gripped the levers that directed the machine-gun-like explosions of oxyhydrogen in the propulsion tubes, which were shaped like flaring cannon.

There was a muffled roar—a terrific lurch — intense pressure underfoot—then a numbing reaction as the hydraulic apparatus slipped back toward normal. They were on their way at last, soaring toward the roof of the universe with increasing velocity as Philip maneuvered the propulsion controls with extreme caution. For the danger of too great physical shock was coupled with that of air friction outside. He must guard against heating the Rocket to meteor-like incan-

descence, which would result from too rapid movement through the envelope of atmosphere that blankets the earth a hundred miles or more deep.

With the aid of periscope, thermometer and altimeter, he guided the great projectile up from the earth's plane to the floor of the vacuum lined by the air layers' rarest outposts. Behind him Donald busied himself quietly, with pressure gages and oxygen control for their air supply, also checking their course as the pull of the crystal-covered, moonlight-sensitive selenium in the Rocket's cone began to make itself felt when the erratic early rush of the machine settled into a more constant and increased speeding toward its objective. Released from the danger and resistance of air friction, the great projectile was doubling and redoubling its velocity as the drag of the earth's gravity decreased with the fast-growing distance intervening. From an estimated initial velocity of a mere one hundred and fifty miles an hour, they already had attained ten times that velocity; and the peak was, by no means, yet reached. Maximum propulsion and dwindling gravitation should, according to Philip's careful figuring, culminate in a velocity of approximately 2,500 miles an hour! Allowing for cautious manipulation at both ends of their route, and barring accident, they might expect to reach the moon easily in about a week. There, if the rash venture had not suffered disaster, our planet's satellite might yet know the "neighborliness" of interplanetary commerce! Provided, of course, that the moon were inhabited by thinking creatures.

Philip's thoughts toyed with these strange conjectures as he nursed the Rocket to a course and speed of stability where he could relinquish the controls for a time. Sanderson, as well as Donald, had been drilled in the intricacies of the Rocket's control, so that each might stand watch. How difficult it seemed to grasp the fact that they were already a small world unto themselves, soaring between stars!

Presently Donald, who no longer found it necessary to adjust gages and such, came over to Philip.

"Want me to relieve you, Phil?"

He did. He turned away with a sigh of relief from the terrific tension of that first, momentous hop-off.

Sanderson was staring moodily through one of the window-like openings through the Rocket's double shell —it was between these two shells that the supplies of water and oxygen were stored, while above them, in the great central chamber, was stored that all-important surplus of gas that must drive them to the moon and back. Beryl had retired into another of the three compartments within the lower part of the Rocket's barrel.

"Well, you're a 'sky pilot' in more ways than one now, Don," Sanderson remarked as the other took the controls. "For a minister turned mechanic, you certainly do fly high."

"Not nearly so 'high' as we may fly if we shunt into one of these stray meteors en route," was the prompt come-back.

Philip's blood chilled suddenly. Derelicts of the sky! That was something he had not counted upon. Strange how one might plan for every seeming emergency, and then overlook entirely something like that. Well, it was one of the chances they must take, just as a great liner takes that ten-thousand-to-one chance of striking some uncharted obstruction in midocean.

CHAPTER 3

NOON of "Saturday," the space-flyers' second earthly day out, found them with more than an eighth, or some 30,000 miles, of their route covered according to Philip's observations of the moon's swelling size. Already they were beyond any appreciable pull of gravitation from the earth, whose ever-so-faintly-illumi-

nated face was barely visible behind them, lit, as its visible hemisphere was, solely by the reflection of the moon's fattening crescent.

The continual driving power of the explosions through the propulsion tubes, ever accelerating their movement, helped them to maintain their own "weight" and equilibrium within the Rocket's chambers in spite of the weakening pull of the planet they were leaving so rapidly behind.

But this happy normality was not to continue indefinitely. It was Beryl who first noticed something amiss.

Until now, every mechanical detail of the Rocket had functioned perfectly. The big, high-pressure, central chamber of oxyhydrogen gas showed but slight depletion on the pressure gage; the oxygen air-devitiating supply and air-purifying apparatus, the water and the supply of condensed foods, the electric heating and lighting energy—all were as should be, apparently.

Sanderson was at the controls for the time, Philip checking over their supplies. Donald was snatching some needed rest. Beryl, who had insisted upon doing a shift like the rest, was prospecting about, having lately risen from a refreshing sleep. At first she had doubted that she could sleep at all, with the roaring of the tubes in her ears; but that din had been reduced to a dull muttering with their passage beyond the atmosphere belt.

It was a different note in this important muttering of explosions that she now noticed. She had just looked into one of the peak periscopes to study again the fascinating image of the satellite toward which they were now, supposedly, rushing at approximately two thousand miles an hour!

But the mirror failed to show the broadening crescent. No longer was the Rocket headed toward the moon!

Raising her head, she listened again and more intently, with a slowly gathering sense of alarm. Why were they no longer pointed directly toward the moon? What connection had this with that curious change in the pulsation of the quintet of tubes beneath the Rocket's sealed floor? She felt faintly dizzy, uncertain on her feet, as one feels after turning round several times in some childish game. Sanderson and Philip appeared, however, not to have noticed anything amiss, but this might be due to their both being seated.

"Phil—John!" she cried. "Something's wrong with me—or with us. Listen."

She saw Philip pale and rise unsteadily to his feet. Sanderson peered anxiously into the peak periscope before him, then quickly toward Philip. There was panic in his eyes.

"We're—we're off course, Phil," he said. "What makes us feel so——"

"Number five is slowing down!" shouted the inventor, staggering a little as his trained ear now led him toward the pipe-line that fed the firing-mechanism of the offending tube. "We're traveling in a circle—like a pinwheel!"

He reached the clock regulating device on that tube, by which the terrific gas explosions were regulated independently as desired, and began feverishly to inspect it.

At that moment all sound of firing in number five ceased!

It might here be explained that the reason for individual timing on each tube was that this arrangement permitted of changing the course of the Rocket by accelerating the explosions in one, two or three tubes on any side. Normally, however, all five tubes were timed alike, for a straight course. It was the pull or attraction of the moon-sensitive selenium exposed under the glass covering of the Rocket's conical head that had maintained their course almost automatically ever since Philip had first maneuvered the giant machine into its original course by means of the separate timing levers. The cessation altogether of the firing in any tube, however, meant that they would

be thrown completely and violently off their course.

Simultaneously with the cessation of firing in number five, one wall of the chamber appeared to tower suddenly above them, at the same time drawing them toward it with irresistible force. Unprepared for this phenomenon, Philip felt himself thrown against that wall crashingly.

For a moment he lay there dazed. Then he became aware of a soft, warm bundle pressed against him. It was Beryl, as dazed as he, one arm twined instinctively about his neck. A few feet away Sanderson was wriggling to a sitting posture against the pressing wall, while in the doorway of the men's quarters opposite, Donald clung desperately.

"Centrifugal force," he yelled. "We're chasing our own tail round and round." He essayed a scared smile. "What a treat for our astronomer friends at home with the telescopes! Say, we've got to tie into that clock affair somehow before we get too woozy, or——"

"Wait," cried Philip, disengaging himself somewhat reluctantly and as gently as possible from Beryl's clasp. He helped her into a more secure position. Then he began crawling laboriously toward the control by means of various, mercifully handy valve-handles and other mechanical projections within reach here and there on the floor. Finally he managed to clutch the railing round the nest of controls. A moment later he had jerked over the main lever, cutting off the explosions in all five tubes.

In the odd quiet that followed, the centrifugal force which had swung the inmates of the Rocket against the wall was suddenly and disconcertingly lacking. With the propulsion of the tubes lacking also, the weakened pull of the earth's gravitation many thousands of miles away supplied but little stability to the adventurers in their movements. Their weights now reduced to but a small fraction of normal, they found it extremely difficult to walk about without bumping their heads against the wall above them—"wall" because the Rocket had been on a swing parallel to the earth's surface at the moment Philip cut off the tubes. The consequence was that the Rocket was now traveling at a right angle to its original course—at a speed of probably a thousand miles an hour! Whether the selenium could overcome this force in time to check their mad rush so far off course was a question.

But already Philip and Donald were at work upon the offending mechanism. For thirty-five precious minutes they labored tediously while Beryl and Sanderson looked on in stunned silence. Everything—the success of their adventure, their very lives—depended upon the perfect mastery of all five tubes' propulsion. For even if the selenium did eventually right their course, and bring them to the moon, without that perfect control they would be powerless to break the terrific force of the Rocket's fall on to the moon!

At last the cover of the recalcitrant mechanism was snapped into place once more. Philip and Donald exchanged breathless glances as the young inventor paused before trying the tubes again.

"Here's luck," said Philip as, with nerves taut, he prepared to throw the switch that should ignite the gas in the chambers and set into motion simultaneously the five powerful driving-devices.

Four hearts almost ceased beating for one brief instant. Then——

"They're off!" yelled Donald as the even roar of every tube smote upon their eardrums.

Never had a din sounded more welcome to human ears. Never had human beings heard sweeter music than the steady, throbbing explosions in the great, vacuous space behind and around them. For one long minute they waited anxiously for a possible

return of the Rocket's tail-chasing antics—and, happily, in vain.

With careful precision, Philip began to time the explosions on opposite sides so as to swing the Rocket gradually back to its course. Slowly the slice of moon swung into full view in the peak periscope. One great peril had been met and conquered for the time.

CHAPTER 4

SUNDAY saw the adventurers speeding steadily across the sky toward their objective without further mishap. Beryl had spent several hours in the typing of a detailed account of their trip, to date, in duplicate. The copy was to be dispatched back toward earth by means of a smaller rocket!

This projectile was to be fired from a gun that was built into the floor of one of the three chambers, near the middle of the Rocket's circumference. Once this miniature Rocket was shot at the earth, it was reasonable to believe that the combined force of its discharge and subsequent self-propulsion, and the earth's gravitation, would result in the carrying of its sealed chamber of news to the millions eagerly awaiting this story. As for the possibilities of radio transmission, even had they been equipped to send while racing through space, that would have been out of the question, for they had not been able to get more than a murmur on their ultra-modern receiving-set from the powerful radio-casting stations on earth; and not even that murmur could be got now. This precluded the possibility of radio communication between planets—at least with present-day equipment.

"Suppose this ether-mail rocket we send falls into some gathering of people," said Beryl. "What then?"

"A mechanically controlled, metal-parachute device is timed to open gradually so as to retard and reduce the fall of the aluminum rocket to almost nothing as it passes through the progressive strata of atmosphere round the earth," Philip explained. "The same action will also release and expel the unburned reserve of gas, so cutting off the power of the rocket's driving-mechanism. This final kindling of the gas, together with a quantity of smudge powder, will produce a harmless flare with a heavy smoke visible either night or day as a signal and a warning.

"The theory sounds fine, Professor," observed Sanderson. "May I apply now for position as postmaster-general of the lunar-earth mails?"

He turned his handsome profile aside toward Beryl as if inviting her applause, but she appeared to have lost interest in the subject.

"Apply to your heart's content," put in Donald. "Try applying some of your talent now to checking and maintaining this space-ship's course."

The sealing and firing of the mail rocket was a ceremony to which they all had looked forward as eagerly as children with a new toy. It was improbable that another one could be sent with a reasonable chance of its arriving on earth, for they would soon be so far away that the available charge in so small a cylinder would scarcely carry it safely within the earth's pull before it had wandered into space off to one side perhaps. They did have, however, one reserve rocket. The dispatching was set for "mid-afternoon"—though out here in space the sun blazed incessantly, unrelentingly, out of a black, airless void, all but overheating the walls of the great metal projectile despite the terrible sub-zero temperature without. Their electric heating-apparatus had therefore been taxed surprizingly little, thus bearing out Philip's theory that the thin atmosphere of the moon—if, indeed, there was any atmosphere on that body—was not unbearably cold during the long lunar day of approximately 350 hours.

The slim, shining cylinder was at last fitted into the torpedo-like cham-

ber of the firing-device, and the breech closed securely. Would that explosion prove too much for the little "world" in which they were precariously voyaging? Suppose calculations on the strength of this part of the Rocket proved wrong. Might not the touching-off of that fuse mean instant obliteration for them all? Such were the thoughts that ran through Philip's mind as he hesitated before pressing the button which would flash the electric spark to the fuse.

A sudden lurch, accompanied by a sharp clap as of thunder—and a thin shaft of flame streaked earthward.

Eagerly they watched its trail dwindle rapidly in the distance, through the glass floor-well. The first astronomical mail was on its way!

"With reasonable luck, our message should be picked up, radiocast, and running under scare heads in the leading newspapers the world over within the next sixty hours," said Philip.

" 'Wuxtra! All about the saps in the moon Rocket'," howled Donald in nasal mimicry of a newsboy.

"My report," observed Beryl, with some pride, "will tell them all about our loop-the-loop exhibition. I guess Ruth will heave an extra sigh of relief that she stayed where she is. But I think it's just grand, really—loops and all."

"Atta girl!" cried Philip. "I nominate you as first-class cheer-leader and morale-booster of this expedition here and now."

"Seconded," said Donald.

"Carried, okeyed and duly recorded," appended Philip, missing a queer look from Sanderson.

CHAPTER 5

The Man-in-the-Moon, looking from out of the eastern half of his face, seemed to smirk sardonically down on one of the strangest spectacles within his fifty-odd million years of existence. Close by, like a mote in his eye—a mere thousand miles or so away—hung an infinitesimal speck. As if to taunt him, this curious object, which had first appeared in his vision as a comet with a short but dazzlingly brilliant tail, had twisted about and was even now spitting flame directly into his face!

However, he continued to smile, for it was hourly becoming more evident that this intruder, whatever its nature, was caught in its own folly, since it was steadily falling toward him, despite its plainly futile efforts to turn about and flee. Soon he would ensnare it in one of the many wrinkles or pits in his countenance and see what manner of thing this was.

But inside the Rocket there was neither consternation nor confusion. The controls functioning perfectly, and the giant conical head now safely diverted and held away from the jagged face of the satellite, it was but a matter of a few hours before those inside might settle upon the queer terrain glaringly outlined in the blazing sunlight—provided, of course, all continued to go well.

Cautiously, with the explosions slowed to a minimum in the propulsion tubes, Philip allowed the Rocket to drop closer to the lunar landscape—if such the forbidding array of craters and the jagged ruts that passed here and there for valleys could be termed. They were now closer to the moon, visually—by the naked eye—than a twelve-inch telescope brought it on earth, this instrument reducing the total intervening distance to approximately five hundred miles; but the resultant magnification of the atmospheric disturbances distorted telescopic vision from earth by a good half, so that it was equivalent to that of at least one thousand miles distant. Yet, even at that visual distance, sufficient detail was clear to have enabled astronomers to map the lunar surface more accurately than the most remote regions of their own globe.

"Has the moon higher mountains than the earth, I wonder," said Beryl.

"Our Mount Everest, with 29,141 feet altitude, about equals the height of the Liebnitz range over there by the southern pole—as computed by the length of the shadows they cast," said Philip, pointing through one of the glass-enclosed window-wells.

"That makes this range much higher, proportionately, than our own highest peaks," observed Donald, "for the earth is several times larger than the moon."

"Exactly. If terrestrial ranges were similarly proportioned, we would have there peaks ten to fifteen miles high."

"Do you suppose that if the moon has inhabitants, they are correspondingly taller than us?" Beryl queried anxiously.

"There is nothing to guide us in such a conjecture," said Philip.

"Now, just suppose, Professor," put in Sanderson, emphasizing the last word faintly and with an odd glint in his eye, "just suppose our Beryl, here, were suddenly to come upon a moon-being of monstrous stature and evil intent, with several like monsters at his heels. What would you recommend—or do? Level the trusty gat—what?"

It had grown increasingly evident during the last forty-eight hours or so that the tall botanist was slightly jealous of the attention Beryl gave Philip in their ordinary association and conversation.

Philip's reply was drowned by a shout from Donald, who was staring below excitedly through the floor-well.

"We're dropping into a valley of fire!" he shouted. "Pull 'er up, Phil!"

Four pairs of eyes riveted themselves upon the terrain immediately beneath them, which began to slide off to one side as Philip tilted the Rocket by means of increased propulsion through two of the tubes on one side. Between jagged ridges which formed a pass from one huge crater to another, a wall of steam or whitish smoke rose high above the surface in ragged streamers, drifting slowly eastward in a semi-opaque fog that made piloting of the Rocket exceedingly difficult. Already the tips of the hungry white fingers were reaching above the Rocket!

For a few tense moments the Rocket slipped through an enveloping haze that hid the black, star-studded sky above as effectively as it did the bright terrain below. Then, abruptly, they were out of it again, the streamers behind them silhouetted against the dark heavens—dark, still, almost to the point of blackness, because of the nearly complete absence of atmosphere at this height to catch and reflect the sun's rays.

The Rocket now was fast leaving the mysterious valley behind, skimming across the satellite's surface away from its sunrise side with increasing speed. Philip thought he had recognized the craters of Cyrillus and Catharina back there, the misty pass linking the two.

"That didn't look like a fire, after all," Donald remarked. "What did you all think of it, gang?"

"A volcanic crevasse with steam and gasses escaping," guessed Beryl. "What do you think it was, Phil?"

Again that odd look from Sanderson; but she was not conscious of it—or else chose to ignore it.

"I believe it's the terrific heat of the sun beating down through the rare atmosphere, melting and vaporizing the snow that collected in the valley or canyon during the long lunar night," said Philip, voicing a theory which they were later to discover to be a fact. "It looks as if we're going to have a tough time of it at 'noon', should we land when those peaks no longer throw a cooling shadow."

The sun, however, lighted but a half of the moon's face at present, the latter being at what we know as "half

moon", its western half being still hidden from the adventurers in the inky lunar night.

"It is my guess," Philip continued, "that the moon gets just as hot at midday as it gets cold at night—if you get what I mean. If we find any animal life at all, we'll probably find that it exists mainly in caverns."

Presently a new phenomenon was observed, this time by Beryl.

"What could those funny light streaks be, radiating from that big crater over there?"

Comparing the crater she pointed out with the maps he had before him, Philip identified it as Copernicus.

"Those streaks," he smiled, "have caused that question to be asked countless times. And no one yet has been able to explain them satisfactorily. We'll drop closer and have a look, and settle this mystery if we can."

Carefully, he let the Rocket down till it was less than five miles above the level of the lofty crater tops. From this elevation it became evident that the streaks were giant fissures in the ground, probably rifts brought about by terrific volcanic upheavals of the past in the brittle lava surface. A white deposit seemed to have been blown out of these crevasses since, covering the surface immediately about them. The latter bore out a theory advanced by Professor Peterson, that the streaks were deposits of pumice or some similar deposit blown out by surface vents.

It was about an hour later that the Rocket, its sidewise travel checked, was slipping along close over the rim opposite the sunrise side of a crater at the edge of the daylit area. Philip recognized it from the lunar chart as Eratosthenes, close by the equator, with several smaller craters about it. This was the region named as the "most alive" by certain astronomers, where melting snows apparently called into existence and watered vegetation of a sort, which showed in progressive tones of gray-green within the crater beds or floors. Hence it was here that Philip hoped to land the Rocket first.

But the first-time landing of a 180-ton machine propelled by high-explosive force was to prove far from simple. Though Philip had expected to drop the Rocket within the crater's rim, where the "live" tones invited, this bull's-eye slid off disconcertingly to one side as he maneuvered the Rocket.

The jagged rim with its black shadows beyond seemed suddenly to rush upward. A great tooth-like point shot directly toward them.

Frantically, Philip threw on still more force in the tubes. But the next instant the Rocket was plunged into a curtain of velvet blackness, rent only by the blinding incandescence of their fiery tail spurting into the Stygian depths beneath them.

CHAPTER 6

Just what followed registered but vaguely in Philip's mind. He remembered the abrupt blotting out of the sun as he strove to counter their sidewise fall. Then a terrific jar shook the Rocket. A scream rang in his ears even as all went blank.

When next he knew consciousness, he looked up to see Beryl's anxious face bent over his head, which rested in her lap as she bathed his forehead in chilled water. Over her shoulder he encountered Donald's troubled gaze, and, beyond, the enigmatic watchfulness of John Sanderson.

A sharp pain shot through his head as he tried to raise it. It seemed surprizingly light, despite the dizziness that thwarted the attempt.

"Easy, Phil," cautioned Donald. "You bounced your knob against a control lever when we lit, and I don't mean 'possibly'."

Philip suddenly noticed, with sinking heart, the outer, curving side of the cylindrical chamber overhead.

"Everything seems to be shipshape, Phil," supplied Beryl, achieving a brave smile. "Nothing seriously damaged; inside, at least, even if we did do a flipflop and land on one side. Donald's modesty forbids his telling you that his own presence of mind in promptly stopping the firing in the tubes at the moment we struck doubtless saved us all."

"At that, I'll bet we plowed up a half-mile of lunar landscape," Sanderson appended. "Lucky we didn't bring up against one of those craters."

"Lucky *you* didn't break your precious neck," retorted Donald peevishly. "Well, folks, wherever we may be, we have arrived, anyway. Black as a villain's heart outside, though. Can't see a thing."

He moved awkwardly toward a window-well.

"Gosh," he said, "I feel kind of shaky myself."

But in this he had plenty of company.

Philip managed to get to his feet, notwithstanding a terrific throbbing in his head.

"Thanks a lot, Beryl," he said gratefully. "Now we'll have to try to find out something definite about our situation, if we can. I wonder—say, I feel like a feather. By George! that reminds me—one should weigh but a sixth of his earthly weight here. That makes me weigh about thirty pounds! Beryl, *you* don't weigh much more than a good-size family album."

"Well, 'small packages' and 'good things' are synonymous, you know," she reminded him, laughing.

Intent inspection through the windows proved the accuracy of Donald's statement; they couldn't, indeed, distinguish any one thing, though it was faintly evident that some sort of blurred landscape lay without.

"Turn off the lights, Don," said Philip, indicating the main switch near the other's hand.

The Rocket's interior was plunged into darkness.

Gradually, as their eyes adjusted themselves to the lack of light, the blurred objects outside took on indistinct yet faintly discernible outlines. It seemed at first that the Rocket had come to rest on a floor of white sand.

"Why, it's snowing!" cried Beryl abruptly. "And look at the *size* of those flakes!"

"Those are pancakes, not snowflakes," observed Donald, peering out. "Gosh, they're as big as my hand."

The top of a single, huge boulder close beside the Rocket was draped in a mantle of clinging white, while huge, feathery flakes settled with exaggerated slowness like a slow-motion picture. What a happy miracle, thought Philip as he saw it, that the Rocket had not crashed into that rock, head on!

"I'm going out to investigate," he said, making for the closet that contained the portable oxygen tanks, the warming suits, and glass-vizored respiration masks with which the Rocket had been equipped to combat the anticipated rarity of the moon's atmosphere.

"I'm with you," spoke up Donald, quickly.

"Someone should guard the Rocket," said Philip. "How about you this time, John? And, Beryl, you'd better stay until we sample this lunar atmosphere."

"Some people get all the fun," she pouted.

"We'll be back in a jiffy," promised Philip, rashly.

The inside manhole was removed, then replaced and screwed tightly behind them as they slipped into the well through the now perpendicular floor. There was a tense moment as the two paused before lifting the outer manhole from its seat. Would the lunar atmosphere prove to be an utter vacuum, causing the natural pressure within their bodies to explode their very flesh into puffed monstrosities? Would the cold be so intense that the heavy, electrically heated garments

they wore would fail to protect them even for an instant? These were the doubts that besieged them.

Both fears were quickly dispelled as they lifted the manhole clear. No gripping hand of vacuum seized them. No paralyzing wave of cold seared them as they leaned out and surveyed the white landscape, though it was apparent that the cold was severe.

On account of the precarious tilt of the Rocket's base, they were obliged to lower themselves, feet first, with the aid of a rope which they fastened to a rung underneath, down the smooth surface between the flaring tubes which projected from the floor like giant blunderbusses; a distance of about a dozen feet to the snow-covered ground. Owing to the possibility of a complete lack of atmosphere outside the Rocket, it had not been practicable to drop the ladder into position through the manholes. For, with both openings uncovered at one time, the precious supply of atmosphere within would have been expelled into a vacuum in one quick blast.

As they dropped into the white fluff, it rose in a cloud, to settle back slowly to a depth of about two feet. Clearly, the slight weight of everything on the moon was responsible for this phenomenon. But it also indicated the reassuring presence of a fairly normal supply of air—or some other gaseous substitute. Their own clumsy movements, it struck Philip, were something like those of divers undersea, their progress at once helped and hindered by their reduced weight in the element round them.

A quick survey of their immediate surroundings showed further how lucky had been their escape. For though the Rocket had left no perceptible path in the lightly settled flakes, through which they pushed, knee-deep, without effort, its position indicated the direction it had plowed before coming to rest — less than four feet from the large boulder they had observed from inside. The carpet of snow, light as it was, had doubtless figured in the miracle of their sliding fall and stop without shattering the brittle glass cone at the Rocket's peak, which Philip could see with his flash was still intact!—an added and inexplicable miracle.

Visibility was limited to less than a dozen yards. Only a dull glow from behind them indicated the lighted window-wells through the heavy veil of flakes. The moon was in that part of its orbit where even if the earth were at zenith in the lunar heavens, instead of low upon the horizon, it would not have been visible to reflect "earthlight" on to the moon's night landseape; this because the side of the earth toward them was its night side, the sun being well beyond it. When, however, the moon should be approximately between the earth and the sun, the earth would appear as an immense "moon" itself, lighting its satellite's night terrain with several times the brilliance of earthly moonlight as we know it.

The cold, which at first they had not felt so keenly in the excitement of setting foot upon lunar soil, already was making itself uncomfortably evident, though chiefly through their masks. These were not heated like the rest of their suits, though they were heavily lined with fur. It was apparent that they could accomplish little under present conditions. Philip drew close to Donald, to grasp his arm and communicate a suggestion to return to the Rocket.

But in that instant the other suddenly gripped his arm tightly, pointing with his other hand in evident excitement off to where the light from his flashlight faded into indistinguishable grayness.

Philip directed the beam of his own light toward the same spot. At first he could see nothing that might have aroused Donald's excitement. Then, his flesh tingling at the sight, he saw a convex object like the top of a big

ball, rising up out of the white fluff about ten yards away!

Slowly, eerily, this strange object continued to rise, swelling in size as the loosely packed flakes slid down its sloping sides, until approximately a fifth of a flattish sphere was revealed. At this point the edge of the object came into view. It was much like a giant mushroom.

As the edge raised farther, the blackness underneath was penetrated sufficiently by the glow of their flashlights for them to observe a stem-like affair in the center, coming up out of a great, round, black well, somewhat smaller in diameter than the cap itself.

For a half minute the pair stood motionless with amazement. Then a blinding white light suddenly enveloped them.

CHAPTER 7

"THE sun!" cried Donald, jerking off his headgear in wild abandon.

For one long, tense second Philip waited for the worst, half expecting to see Donald's features convulsed in sudden gasping for air. But the other only shivered and promptly replaced the fur lining of the respiration mask he had pulled off in his joy of seeing the sunlight again. Philip glanced up at the towering rim of the crater against the sun's glare—the crater whose edge they had fortunately missed when they fell just beyond into its long black shadow which was now slowly shortening in the light of lunar dawn.

Removing his own outer headgear, Philip found the atmosphere not unpleasant, though rare like that on our own high peaks. The cold was not so intense, after all. That blazing sun, penetrating the thin, rare band of lunar atmosphere, already was making itself felt. Indeed, the settling saucer-like flakes had all but disappeared from the air already, seemingly a product of moisture temporarily stored in the air immediately around them, rather than of any cloud formation above.

In their astonishment and exhilaration at the sun's abrupt dawning, Philip and Donald had momentarily forgotten the curious object pushing its way up out of the white blanket on the ground. To their further amazement and some uneasiness, they now observed more of these caps rising into view all around them.

At the same time a faint mist began to fill the air, swirling between them and the caps. The feathery snow seemed to be dissolving into a lazy white vapor in the sun—much like the white streamers they had elsewhere observed from above in the Rocket.

The nearest of the caps had ceased to rise—had come to rest some five feet above the steaming snow's surface. It appeared to be formed of metal or stone, or of some composition, perhaps, entirely unknown to them. It measured about twenty-five feet in diameter.

But stranger still were the creatures that peered out at them through the mist, between the snow and the rims of these huge mechanical mushrooms. Squat and leaden-gray like their curious protective contrivances were their heads, immediately conspicuous for two very large round eyes guiltless of eyelids or lashes, and like nothing so much as squashed spheres. A repulsive, sucker-like aperture answered for a mouth, while a sort of gill protuberance did duty for a nose. Of hair on their heads they had none, save such as grows on the back of the average man's hand. The result was an unsightly bareness of skull that increased their general repulsiveness, for their skin was moist and slithery—like freshly filled sausage skins in a butcher's window.

Philip suppressed a shudder. These were the lunarites, with whom they must deal. Fear or unchecked loathing would not help their mission. Then the thought of the girl inside the Rocket came to him like a shock, and

he shuddered again. If these offensive creatures attempted to do her, and them, violence—well, he would sell his life as dearly as possible.

The lunarites appeared hesitant to come forth. They continued to stare owlishly at these visitors from the heavens, from under the protection of their giant mushrooms. Curious, sibilant, thin cries sounded as they gesticulated and pointed with oddly twisted arms and fingers, now at Philip and Donald, now at the Rocket beyond them.

Soon, however, several generated sufficient courage to clamber out from under the more distant caps. These were quickly followed by others. A gray horde rapidly was gathering now, on squat but slender legs that were like saplings—was moving cautiously, curiously closer.

Other details about these disquieting creatures registered indelibly in Philip's mind as the gray circle shrank about them; he could already count more than twenty of the caps near by through the rising mist which already was stretching long white streamers skyward in the dimming sunlight like those they had encountered before while in flight. From each of these caps now scrambled an unending stream of lunarites. Slightly less than four feet tall they were, with oversized, oddly peaked ears—so proportioned, probably, to aid their owners in catching all available sound in their world's rare atmosphere. It was this rareness of atmosphere that doubtless accounted for the ghost-like quality of the flakes and the white blanket they had formed, which was evaporating rather than melting.

Philip observed too—first in amazement, then with dawning understanding—that these beings were without clothing other than a narrow sash affair about their flat hips! Apparently they were fairly immune to cold; though the rim of the slowly rising sun had already moderated the temperature enough to make his heavy garb uncomfortable, even with the electric pads in it turned off. It was evident that his supposition that the lunar day when cleared of mists near noon—or even when well advanced in the 350-hour day—reached withering temperatures, was correct, at least so far as concerned this region.

"Hadn't we better give these babies something to think about?" suggested Donald. "A flash of gunpowder up in the air or something?"

He tapped the automatic at his belt.

"Just stand firm," said Philip. "It won't do to let them get the idea that we are afraid of them, nor do we want to frighten them. Somehow we must contrive to win their confidence—if we can."

He advanced a pace in front of Donald and threw up one hand in a gesture of greeting to the little gray men. Immediately those in front fell back, crowding the others in mild panic. Evidently they regarded these strange beings from out of space with awe. A little flurry of excited twittering and squeaking was heard again.

Pointing in the general direction of the earth, Philip made a sweeping gesture back to the moon, next pointing significantly toward the Rocket looming in the vapor behind him. How he wished it were standing up in position to take flight again at will in an emergency! A fresh gibbering here broke out among the nearer ranks, and numbers of these lunarites patted the tops of their hairless heads—probably a sign of understanding.

"Now what?" inquired Donald, disconcertingly.

"How do I know?" retorted Philip, unfastening his suit about the top.

"Gosh, this lunar sunshine is a fast worker," Donald muttered, doing the same.

PHILIP was just wondering what he might offer the lunarites as a goodwill gift — if he could single out a leader — when, as if in answer to a wish, a lunarite who was a good head

taller than his fellows appeared from among them. He approached Philip and Donald slowly. A trifle less grotesque than the others, with less flattened head, there was a suggestion of intelligence about him, even in those nearly expressionless, unlidded eyes. A shorter lunarite beside him bore on outstretched hands a flat metallic slab with what appeared to be some sort of food heaped on it in an olive-hued mound.

It was then that Philip noticed three peculiar, twining fingers on those hands—like thickened fingers of a vine, with which it clutches and clings to things!

"If it's something to eat he's got there, I hope it's not as slippery as he looks," whispered Donald, inelegantly.

Presently the creatures halted before Philip, the leader evidently selecting him, also, as a leader by reason of his being taller than Donald, and gravely handed Philip the slab. Then, after making signs unmistakably identifying the substance thereon as food, he stepped back a pace and waited. Obviously, he expected them to begin eating then and there.

"If we refuse to at least nibble on this, they'll probably get sore and blot us out," mourned Donald.

But Philip merely smiled at the leader and pointed up again, then shook his head in what he hoped might be understood in the negative. He could not bring himself to eat that curious gelatinous substance; nor did he feel that he or Donald need risk it. The impression he tried to convey for the time being was that they did not eat at all, or at least did not require any food then.

His signs at last understood, apparently, there followed a conference of bewildered astonishment between the nearest lunarites and their leader. They conversed among themselves in their strange tongue, which sounded not unlike the hissing undertone of a large congregation intoning a prayer. They waved their scrawny, warped arms about excitedly.

Presently they seemed to reach an agreement. The others fell back from around the leader, who once more approached Philip, this time without the food offering. Halting a few feet away, he went through a series of gestures that plainly indicated the desire of himself and fellows that their visitors from the heavens accompany them back into the curious pot-like affairs sheltered by those raised caps. With insinuating creasings of countenance, which probably did duty for a smile, the leader was inviting them to descend to the lunarites' regular habitat, possibly an underground metropolis.

The idea was not without appeal, for the adventurers had come to study this strange globe, and might even have to depend upon these creatures and their good-will to exist in the end. Yet Philip hesitated to leave Beryl behind. Would she be safer inside the Rocket until he and Donald could return? Or would she be better off with them? And should he ask Donald, or Sanderson, to remain on guard in the Rocket—which? Truly, it had been a mad and terrible mistake to bring Beryl along on this ill-fated trip.

But these considerations were rudely pushed aside by the events that followed swiftly, removing all need for a decision then.

Even as he pondered, Beryl and Sanderson slid down the rope from the Rocket, without respiration masks, evidently having observed, from inside, his and Donald's removal of this apparatus. A rift in the haze showed them wading through the light, melting snow. Beryl's cheeks were glowing with excitement.

The effect of her appearance upon the gaping lunarites was galvanic, startling.

There was an immediate wave of sibilant utterances as they surged forward round their leader, everyone

clamoring for his attention and pointing toward Beryl. Observing their unwonted attention to her, the girl halted uncertainly, and made as if to run back to the Rocket. Then she changed her mind and ran over to Philip, followed by Sanderson.

"What is it? — oh, why are they acting so — so queerly?" she cried, trembling within the circle of a protecting arm he had instinctively thrown about her.

"God knows," he said hoarsely. But he had an idea that her feminine charms were responsible for the strange behavior of these creatures. "You shouldn't have come out here yet, Beryl. Come, we'd best be moving back toward the Rocket. Don—John—let's get under cover before this buzzing swarm makes up its mind to stop us—before it's too late. Something's gone wrong."

They had not covered more than a dozen feet before the swelling gray pack was after them. Too late Philip realized that their retreat had precipitated the very thing he had hoped to avert, had galvanized them into sudden pursuit. With an unexpected agility, the lunarites leaped after and upon the quartet from all sides.

For a seemingly interminable space, Philip fought off a horde of softish gray little men as they charged upon him in waves. Time and time again his fist connected squarely with the slithery heads of his assailants. They would give, much like mush-filled rubber bags, while, with a weird whistling gasp, that lunarite would slip to the ground—only to have two immediately take his place. And beyond the seething gray cordon Philip could see others pouring up from the depths.

Back to back now, he and Donald fought on, a valiant but losing battle. For, despite their superior strength as compared to that of the lunarites, it was plainly but a question of time before the gray horde would have worn them out, overwhelmed them. Already Sanderson, Philip saw from a corner of his eye, was buried under a flailing pile of lunarites. And Beryl, he suddenly saw, with a wave of wretchedly impotent fury, being borne away, struggling bravely, by a half-dozen gray men toward one of the underground apertures.

All but overpowered by the entwining fingers and arms, he tore himself loose once more, with a hitherto untapped reserve of strength born of desperation and berserk rage. Loth at first to use his automatic, for fear of irretrievably antagonizing these beings, he now managed to reach and draw it. He gave a yell of hate and poured a leaden stream into the surging bodies.

For a few seconds the lunarites fell back. Several of their number writhed, hissing, in the snow among the others who had previously been beaten down to death or insensibility. Donald, following Philip's lead, had emptied his gun into the horde.

Beryl had disappeared.

Their respite, however, was brief. With renewed fury, the lunarites were upon them again. An earthy odor of underground places was in Philip's nostrils as he was borne down under the weight of countless twining, musty bodies. He was conscious of a cooling froth of snow as his face was ground into the hard soil underneath; then sudden oblivion.

CHAPTER 8

A PECULIAR tingling sensation attended Philip's return to consciousness—like hundreds of needle-points pressing against his skin all over. Lacking the power to open his eyes for the time, he groped blindly in the space before him. Then, abruptly, his numbed brain wrenched loose from its mysterious fetters.

At first, as his eyelids fluttered open, it seemed to him that he was floating, unsupported, in space. A

strange gray-green luminousness glowed directly over him, like a low-hanging, iridescent cloud. Then he perceived that this was not cloud-like at all, but, instead, a phosphorescent ledge of some sort about four feet above him. Almost he could reach up and touch it. But he dared not, for fear of some fatal force that might be connected with it. A musty stench pervaded the air he breathed.

He began to investigate cautiously, feeling about him. His fingers came into contact underneath with a moist, flat surface, not unlike wet sand. Twisting his head about clumsily, for he was still numb and stiff, he saw that he was lying in a long, narrow chamber whose length on one side—the side on which he lay—was paralleled by the glowing strip overhead. At the other side a black chasm yawned above and below.

It rather surprized him to find himself unbound, but he was willing to accept this favor of fate without question for the present. His head throbbed painfully. He raised himself on his elbows with an effort. It was then he discovered that the "chasms" above and below along the other side of the narrow chamber were not chasms at all, but merely had appeared that way beyond the glow immediately above him. He saw now, too, that there was a low, dark roof over the whole, just above the iridescent ledge; while, in the shadows, about a yard below the shelf on which he lay, there was a floor.

As he glanced back under the long, glowing roof, it seemed to him that curious protuberances of various sizes showed above the shelf's surface—not unlike dark toadstools pushing up through the substance that comprised it, except that here and there in the dim distance the sizes and shapes were larger and confused. Something pernicious and dread seemed to pervade the very air about him—he knew not what; something beyond the limits of his earthly imagination.

Ignoring the aching throughout his body, doubtless due to the mauling he had received at the hands of the lunarites in his terrific battle with them, he lowered himself slowly over the edge until his feet touched the floor.

As he stood up stiffly, a familiar figure groped toward him out of the gloom, startling him sharply, for his nerves were on razor edge.

"Donald!" he exclaimed, grasping his friend by the shoulders. "Thank God you're safe. But Beryl—what have they done with her! And Sanderson?"

"That's what I want to know as badly as you. I was knocked out completely right after you went down. They must have taken us for a couple of mushrooms—'planting' us in this crazy joint. So help me, it looks like a blamed toadstool cavern. Did you notice how that queer light up there seemed to prick your skin? Bet that's some invention of these confounded lunarites that makes things grow double quick. Maybe they laid us out under it to give its strange power a chance to revive us. Must take us for a couple of eggplants."

"The thing that concerns me right now is finding our way out of this place and reaching Beryl and Sanderson before it's too late. Let's try this way first."

And he led the way down the slender chamber toward its unseen end, or toward what he felt must be an end of it.

They had proceeded no more than a dozen yards when a shadowy form suddenly loomed before them. While Philip was still debating whether or not to leap upon and throttle this form first and investigate afterward, the creature hissed a single syllable that obviously was a command to halt.

Philip hesitated. They might sub-

due this creature quietly and return the way they had come, in hope of finding that direction unguarded. Then he reflected that that way was no doubt guarded as well, if it led outside. Might as well go along with this lunarite and try to find out from his fellows what had been done with Beryl and Sanderson.

Then another lunarite appeared as noiselessly as the first and took up a position in back of them. In this order they followed the other through a side opening that had escaped their notice.

Presently they emerged into what Philip, at first glance, took to be outdoors. Upon closer observation, however, he perceived that they stood in another cavern, but one so vast, so amazing in its proportions, that the walls were all but invisible in the faintly luminous atmosphere that enveloped them. Like the blue tint of earthly skies, this luminosity was not perceptible immediately around them, but it could be seen plainly when looking through distant volumes of it—a greenish tint about the same depth as our own blue sky. While it did not have the brilliance of the ledge in the long chamber they had left behind, it was of sufficient intensity to light the surroundings clearly.

Still following their guide, with the second lunarite watchfully bringing up the rear, they passed for some time through curious gray throngs of lunarites along a thoroughfare formed by squat, hexagonal, tent-like abodes.

"These bimbos must not have any kids at all," remarked Donald. "I haven't seen anything but the one size—except that taller one that made the powwow with us when we first landed among these misbegotten creatures."

"I was wondering about the same thing," said Philip thoughtfully. "Hello—'talk about the devil——'"

Before a larger and different-hued tent, within a semicircle of attendants, some of whose heights approached but did not quite reach him, stood the lunarite whom our adventurers had originally seen by the Rocket at the head of that threatening gray crowd. At any rate, he appeared to be the same one, for Philip recognized the colors and the style of his apparel. Color seemed to be at a painful premium in this drab world, for there was no break in the monotonous gray in everything about all the others, including their tents, with the exception of several of the attendants closest to this personage—probably dignitaries of a sort, or possibly his kin, if, indeed, these queer people knew such a relationship.

Philip and Donald were directed to enter the large abode, through a door covered with a flap made of the same coarsely woven fiber that Philip had observed was the texture of the walls of all the tent-like houses along their way here.

They were preceded inside by the leader and his attendants, the latter squatting on the floor at the sides and rear of their chief. Chairs, the lunarites seemed to know nothing about. Indeed, the adventurers were to learn that one of the secrets of these creatures' maintaining an existence on this all-but-dead world was their willingness to dispense with anything and everything that was not absolutely essential to life. Of luxuries they knew none, nor many of the things we consider essential in our own somewhat pampered existence.

Like the rest, the leader squatted upon the hard, dry ground, indicating by gestures that Philip and Donald should do likewise.

At a sign from the leader, an attendant approached them and began to sketch, with what looked like a stout twig, upon the smooth surface of the ground before them. Philip followed, with fascinating gaze, the motions of those gray, twisted fingers which were so much like gnarled vines

wrapped round the smaller, straighter twig they held.

Displaying surprizing skill as an artist, the lunarite rapidly drew a recognizable likeness of a woman, which, from her familiar, earthly garb, Philip instantly knew represented Beryl.

The sketch of a man followed, the lunarite pointing from it to Philip. Another was drawn to represent Donald. Still another followed. This, by gestures and sundry hissings, in addition to its added height, they recognized as the absent Sanderson.

Apparently satisfied that their visitors had followed these "writings" thus far, the lunarites proceeded with what was clearly a recounting of the individual adventures of the quartet, following their capture. Beryl, it seemed, had been brought to this very abode—was a prisoner in the adjoining room!

Sanderson, it seemed, had been selected as leader of the invaders, by reason of his tallness. The latter characteristic, the adventurers were to learn, was the one conclusive distinction by which the lunarites recognized their own leaders and these leaders' autocratic rule. Hence their automatic selection of Sanderson, who stood six feet one and a half inches without his shoes—two and one half inches taller than Philip, whose near six feet topped the stocky Donald by a similar margin. Donald himself topped the lunarites' leader by nearly a foot.

By reason of the lunarites' selection of Sanderson, it appeared that the latter was to be accorded consideration due a visiting dignitary, despite the fracas attending their reception. He was even now being attended as befitted a leader—so sketched the busy, resourceful artist.

"Well, wouldn't that make your grandma's chilblains ache?" muttered Donald.

"More power to Sanderson, if it proves a means of his protecting Beryl from these fiends, Don."

"I guess you are right at that, Phil," agreed the other, doubtfully, but concentrating once more on their artist-interpreter's picture-story.

However, it appeared that the story was at an end. Informing them that he was to be their instructor in the lunar tongue, the artist turned and addressed his leader, evidently telling him that his task of the moment was completed. The leader turned and gave an order to two of his attendants. These got up quickly, one disappearing into the other room, the other passing outside.

Almost at once the first attendant reappeared. With him was a girl.

"Beryl!" cried Philip, striding toward her.

But his path was barred at once by several attendants.

"Oh, Phil!" she cried, dropping her hands back at her sides resignedly as she looked at him with beseeching eyes.

At a gesture from the leader, she sat down on the ground beside the latter. It was at this juncture that Sanderson, accompaied by the other attendant, entered.

Throwing a glance toward Philip and Donald without attempting to speak to them, Sanderson stalked over to where Beryl and the leader sat. Bowing uncertainly before the latter, he smiled down on her. Neither spoke, however, for the interpreter had come forward again at a sign from his master, and now prepared to "talk" with Sanderson by means of his sketches.

A few minutes of this, and Sanderson turned to Philip.

"Phil," he said, "they want me to say to you that to me, as chief of this expedition, they are assigning this house, with you and Don as my fellow boarders. Guess there's no use arguing the leadership point with them for the present. Beryl is to

share the place with us. She will have the inner room."

"It's O. K. with me," said Philip. "Sounds too easy to be true. But we'll have to be on our guard for their next move."

The lunarites' "next move," however, was not to come at once. As Philip suspected, there was a definite reason behind this temporary change in treatment by them, and their own apparent freedom. What that reason was, and its ultimate climax, was yet to be revealed, and that in startling fashion.

CHAPTER 9

During the days that followed—or what the adventurers counted as days by their watches and a system of notches cut in a pole inside their abode—their instruction in the lunar tongue continued. Between these group lessons, they walked about the subterranean domains of the lunarites at will, though never without a special escort supplied by the leader, who, they learned, was known as Sarl.

That Beryl's appearance among the lunar populace elicited nothing more than a craning of scrawny necks now, and stealthy, sidelong glances, indicated that the gray men were held in leash through a fear engendered by strict orders from their leader that she be unmolested in any way.

The adventurers had learned to eat the gray ones' food after all. This was by reason of necessity, since they no longer had access to their own food supply in the Rocket, permission to return to it being politely but firmly denied them. The meager emergency supply they had carried in condensed form in their pockets soon had been depleted. The lunar menu, while monotonous and uninviting in appearance, proved to be not so bad after all. It consisted of various root-like growths on the order of our own rutabagas, yams and such, all grown in these subterranean regions. The disconcerting characteristic of all these was their almost uniformly gray color, their sole range in tint being from a light grayish green to a deep purplish gray. For a beverage, they had their choice of a sulfurous water or a heady wine prepared from one of the various root foods. They stuck to the water, evil-tasting though it was. They grew accustomed to it in time, even to the hard fiber pads that did duty for beds on the unresisting ground.

Meantime, they were finding out much of interest about their captors and their means of living. They learned, for instance, that, except for a comparatively short time following the rising of the sun, and a correspondingly brief time immediately prior to its setting, the lunarites must shun the outside of their globe, because of the extreme cold that prevailed during the long night, but especially because of the extreme heat during all but the very beginning and ending of their equally long day; in this latitude and region at any rate.

As for the "vegetation" suggested by the progressive shades within the crater Eratosthenes and other crater beds, as observed from the earth, it was learned that this growth was but that of rank, weedy things—like the scrub of our own deserts. The melting snows and the periodical vapors did, indeed, feed these growths, but the lunarites derived no nourishment from them. They did manage, however, under severe hardship, to gather hurriedly, immediately after sunrise and just before sunset, some of the weedy growth for weaving the coarse fabric that comprised the walls of their abodes. And, with greater care and skill, they produced a refinement of this fabric in somewhat softer weaves for their meager, drab garments.

Thus Sanderson's botanical talents had little chance for exercise—even

had his activities of intrigue offered that opportunity or inclination.

As a result of the extremes of heat and cold, the lunarites had been forced to perfect many ingenious devices for existing underground. One of these was the mysteriously controlled electric energy with which they were able to charge the air throughout their principal domains, which caused it to glow with the soft light Philip had first observed upon entering the vast main cavern that formed the largest single chamber of these creatures' domains, though this huge chamber or cavern, they learned, was but one of the many immense extinct craters that honeycombed the moon's crust. These caverns had been cleared, enlarged, and linked together by previous generations.

For machinery and such devices as the outlet caps at the moon's surface, the lunarites used a strange dark plastic substance mined from the deeper regions, and which set to iron-like hardness when long exposed to the air.

Incidentally, being well below the surface, the air in these caverns was denser than in the rare atmospheric pressure above. Therefore it provided more normal breathing conditions.

Among the things that Philip most desired to learn was the purpose of certain chambers with huge doors that always remained locked. Other parts of these queer domains were open to the adventurers' inspection; caverns containing strange machinery and devices that had to do with the artesian water supply, lighting, heat from vast volcanic depths, and so on. But the story behind those ever-bolted gray doors intrigued Philip. To his queries of their interpreter and teacher he had obtained but vague replies. This but whetted his curiosity the more.

"There is something beyond those doors that they have good reason to conceal from us," he confided to Donald.

Philip had carefully refrained from discussing anything in Beryl's hearing that might alarm her. And he and Donald had tacitly come to a considering of these things independently of Sanderson, who seemed more interested in his own prestige with the lunar dignitaries, and in Beryl, than in their general welfare and future.

"Yes, and your humble star-dust twin intends to plumb the dark mystery of those dens, or bust," proclaimed the other.

"But 'how' is the question," said Philip. "Something tells me that if we fail to discover their secret before long, none of us may ever have an opportunity. I have a hunch that——"

"Cheese it—old Eggplant is nigh," warned Donald, nudging Philip as the figure of Azan, the interpreter, appeared in the doorway of their abode. This caution was not altogether amiss, for Azan had, in teaching them the lunar tongue, learned much about their own. They could no longer talk within his acute hearing without reserve.

"*Voja*—greetings, my friends," he squeaked, rolling his over-large gourd-like head grotesquely from side to side in the lunar fashion of salaam. "It is time for our talk again. But already you have learned most of what I can teach you—you and the magnificent taller one, and his lovely ward. They are——"

"Here I am, Azan," interrupted Sanderson, entering at that moment.

Azan wriggled convulsively in greeting to Sanderson's six feet plus, while Donald and Philip looked on amusedly, albeit with a liberal sprinkling of sarcasm on the part of the former.

"And the beautiful maiden," pursued the lunarite; "will she be here presently?" His wall-eyes gleamed like those of an octopus.

"She sends her excuses, Azan," said Sanderson with a proprietary air that made Philip wonder all at once

why he had ever chosen this man for a companion on their weird journey. Of late Sanderson's monopoly of Beryl's time and attention had begun to wear on his nerves sharply.

"She does not care to listen to mere words today," Philip put in firmly; "nor do we."

Azan looked from him to Sanderson, then back again with puzzled stare. Philip's manner evidently impressed him, for he favored him with careful attention then. As for Philip, he had suddenly decided that it was time he had asserted himself and halted all this foolish parleying, which was getting them nowhere.

"Harken to me, Azan," he went on. "We have been here thirty-five days and nights—as we reckon them in our own world; more than a day and a night of yours. Beryl—the maiden—needs sunlight, open air. We all do. We can not live in artificial light indefinitely as you can, or on the food that nourishes you. Tell your leader, this Sarl, that we must get back to our space-machine. That we must send a message to our planet to tell them we are safe; else others in countless other machines will follow us here." He might as well make it strong. He would be doubted, but the lunarites could not know for certain whether he lied. It was not beyond the bounds of lunar imagination that the friends of these earth-beings might follow in similar conveyances, to avenge any harm done them.

"I will go to tell him, my friends," wagged the gray one, backing out precipitately. This unexpectedly brusk reception and Philip's disturbing statements had shaken him and upset his ideas badly.

SANDERSON had looked on in silence. As Azan disappeared, however, he found his tongue.

"Now you've done it," he growled. "Why couldn't you have been patient a little longer? Jealous because these people want to treat me like the boss? You'll——"

"Aw, give your tonsils a rest," Donald interjected. "There are things I'll bet you haven't even guessed about our little social spell here, thanks to your heavy interest in living up to the 'head-man' part. Our wriggly visitor who just went out let slip hints of some queer things once or twice when you weren't present—things that I'd say don't make the outlook exactly attractive from Beryl's standpoint."

"For instance——"

"For instance, these squashes are a hybrid race."

"I knew that."

"All right. Maybe you also knew that their average life span is about seven years."

"Seven years! Why, how can they possibly learn to accomplish the things they do in so short a time? Besides, what has that to do——"

"Just this—oh, cripes! You tell him, Phil. I'm no good at wedging facts into a wooden head."

"It's like this, John," Philip explained. "First, if these beings live but seven years, they must mature from eight to ten times as rapidly as we, and they learn and do accordingly, out of necessity as well as by instinct. Besides, everything they do is simplified to the nth degree—not a single non-essential move or consideration of any kind is countenanced. Their language, even, consists of but a scant two or three hundred elemental syllables.

"Now, about the other things: You've noticed, of course, the peculiar characteristic of their arms and hands, particularly the latter?"

"Like growing things—thick grapevines, for instance, with tendrils at the end?"

"You've got the idea. And their legs—shapeless and straight like saplings."

"You mean——"

"——that I believe these creatures represent a phenomenon totally different from anything we have ever imagined in our earthly scheme of animal life. They evidently are a living, breathing and thinking *combination of plant and animal life!* Heaven knows just how they reproduce, but there is their unique command of atmospheric electrical energy — and those novel growing-beds with that energy intensified over them. I'm practically certain now that those curious shapes were what I glimpsed in the dim shadows when I regained consciousness in that long chamber. They were not toadstools but——"

"God! You can't believe that human beings may be spawned and grown like—like mushrooms!"

"I think it possible—in view of what we observed, and with information this Azan has let slip. Evidently, too, like the common house-fly, these beings reach practically full growth at the outset, which would explain why we have seen no 'children'.

"However, what is of vital concern to us, a hellish obsession seems to have taken hold of them, that Beryl—you remember their instinctive and spontaneous reaction to her attraction when she and you stepped out of the Rocket? An instinct that has been held in check since solely by rigid orders from their leader."

"Why the Sam Hill couldn't you have stayed inside a little longer that time?" put in Donald, scowling at Sanderson in anything but a ministerial manner. "The sight of a woman simply set that mob wild."

"Yes, I remember," defiantly. "What of it?"

"Just this: Azan has hinted that the lunarites believe Beryl holds the key to their own release from a strictly tabloid existence—bound by roots and soil. In her presence, they scent some mad possibility not only of increasing their life's span to something approaching our own, but a chance to rise above the soil as a factor in their creation. And their hellish minds have conceived a plan. . . . *Now* do you begin to understand the fate that hovers over her while we dawdle here?"

All three were silent for a time. Even Sanderson seemed to forget his egoism, in contemplation of the fiendishness of this plan of the creatures who held them all in their power.

Two thoughts were paramount in Philip's mind: that Beryl be kept in ignorance of this thing, and that they must make a bold move to get her beyond the clutches of these fiends. How to achieve the latter was the question. As yet he could think of no practical plan. But he would. He must!

All at once he realized that this girl was more precious to him than his life—than anything; that he loved her madly. Strange, how love struck that way—like a bolt of lightning. Incongruously, a humorous saying came to him—something he had heard years ago in a stage farce: "Love grows and grows—like a vegetable." That was it. His love for Beryl had been just growing and growing, quietly, unnoticed almost, like—a vegetable. And now it had developed with disconcerting completeness and abruptness into unmistakable maturity, nurtured by the dew of imminent danger.

Hitherto he had been conscious only of a warm liking for Beryl, attended by a feeling of jealousy, which he had mentally branded as a foolish, unwarranted condition, over her tolerance of Sanderson's attentions. But a full realization of this terrible danger that threatened her now had fired his blood; had suddenly fanned that dormant passion of love for her into full blaze. The thought of Beryl at the mercy of these madmen, these creatures half of animal, half of vegetable kingdoms, made him berserk. Somehow, some way, he must save her. He cursed the feeling of impotence their situation forced upon him. If only

he could conceive a plan, any plan, that had even a one-in-a-hundred chance of success!

In his absorption by this problem he failed to notice Sanderson's departure, and Donald's leaving directly afterward. When he did look up again with seeing eyes, it was to find Beryl contemplating him from the doorway of her room.

"A penny fer them thoughts," she remarked impishly.

"That would be over-pricing them," he answered dully, getting up. "If I got a genuine idea right now, I'd be surprized into fits."

"As bad as that? My, but we are downcast today." Paradoxically, she seemed in unusually fine spirits.

"Please try not to mind my grouch, Beryl," he said, smiling with an effort. He must not let her suspect that dread danger which hung over her. How beautiful she was! That her loveliness should even be gazed upon by these half-human monstrosities maddened him.

She moved toward him, came close and placed a hand on his arm. The nearness of her made his senses reel.

"Why—you are trembling, Phil," she said, surprized and concerned. "Are you ill?"

He patted her hand reassuringly.

"Not ill; just a passing wave of vertigo—probably a bit of biliousness from the long diet of strange food," he lied.

"You must not let yourself get sick," she said solicitously. "After all, we are selfishly depending upon you for guidance in our predicament." She looked up at him with dazzling trustfulness.

"That's just it, Beryl," he groaned. "And I'm a dud. I can't forgive myself for having brought you along on this mad adventure."

"You had little to do with that. I forced myself into this expedition for adventure, excitement; so I have myself to blame—if anyone is to blame. As it is, I am satisfied. We're all in it together now, and together we'll find a way out."

She smiled bravely.

"You're a brick, Beryl," he said, curbing an impulse to sweep her into his arms, to press her soft, pliant body against him and rain kisses upon those dear eyes, those already-paling but still-beautiful cheeks, those alluring lips whose rosiness had not yet succumbed to the lack of sunshine. She swayed against him lightly, perhaps herself a little weak from the enforced confinement, or perhaps impelled by a force akin to that which he felt. The next moment he was doing the very things he had been fighting so hard against!

After a time he released her reluctantly, determinedly.

"I'm sorry, Beryl," he began lamely. Then: "No. I'm damned if I am! I'm glad—*glad!*"

He swept her once more into his arms, and their lips met again as he held her in a long embrace as if fearful to let her go amidst the dangers that surrounded them. And this time she returned his kisses.

"I'm glad, too, Phil," she whispered, a little breathlessly. "And oh, so happy."

Happiness now! Ah, the irony of things, that they should find each other's love at such a time—on the verge of being separated by one of the most dreadful schemes ever conceived by living and thinking beings.

Well, they should not have her alive. He reached for the automatic which he had contrived to keep despite the lunarites' search.

"Promise me you will keep this with you always, dear," he said, "in case of—emergency."

But she handed it back to him.

"I have already thought of that. I carry my own—have ever since we left Mother Earth."

"Good girl," he approved, putting

his own weapon back into the holster inside his shirt. He had thought to strap that extra gun next the calf of his leg before leaving the Rocket, and the lunarites had missed it there in their search. But they had not searched Beryl's person as they had his. There were two guns in the party, anyway. Why, Dame Fortune was actually smiling upon them after all!

He began to take heart. With the knowledge that Beryl loved him, he felt at once confidence—and at the same time more than ever disconcerted—by the dangers they faced. For now she was more precious than ever to him.

A sound of running outside startled him into consciousness again of their immediate situation.

Weird and fantastic were the adventures of the voyagers among the lunarites, as described in next month's WEIRD TALES

IN THE VALLEY

By BERTRANDE HARRY SNELL

I have seen the Valley of Gibbering Men,
  Down where the soulless dwell,
In the viscous sludge of their fog-damned fen
  (A horror-haunted Hell);
I have heard the groans of the gruesome ghosts
  That paddle about in the slime,
And watched the dance of the Hoary Hosts
  In their palsied pantomime.

The rheum-ribbed rocks of the valley walls,
  Where the green ghoul grasses grow,
Hold a horrible lure for the one who falls
  Into the pit, below;
He gazes up at their slimy sides,
  As he lies in his loathsome den,
And he knows that here he, forever, bides
  In the Valley of Gibbering Men.

Hopeless and stricken and rotting they lie,
  Damned to Eternity's end;
Retching and wretched, they long to die,
  Cursing the eons they spend
Down in the depths where the vermin crawl,
  Far from Humanity's ken—
They shudder and shriek when the black gods call,
  In the Valley of Gibbering Men.

The Dancer in the Crystal

by FRANCIS FLAGG

"Out of the ground it rose like an evil jinnee."

THEY who lived during that terrible time will never forget it—twenty-five years ago, when the lights went out.

It was in 1941.

All over the world, in the same hour, and practically at the same minute, electrical machinery ceased to function.

The youth of today can hardly realize what a terrible disaster that was for the people of the middle Twentieth Century. England and America, as well as the major nations of Europe, had just finished electrifying their railroads and scrapping the ponderous steam engines which did duty on some lines up until as late as the summer of 1939. A practical method of harnessing the tides and using their energy to develop electricity, coupled with the building of dams and the generating of cheap power through the labor of rushing rivers and giant waterfalls, and the invention of a device for broadcasting it by wireless as cheaply as it was generated, had hastened this electrification. The perfection of a new vacuum tube by the General Electric Company at Schenectady, in the United States, had made gas eco-

nomically undesirable. The new method, by which it was possible to relay heat for all purposes at one-third the cost of illuminating gas, swept the various gas companies into oblivion. Even the steamers which plied the seven seas, and the giant planes that soared the air, received the power that turned their propellers, warmed their cabins and cooked their foods, in much the same fashion as did the factories, the railroads, and the private homes and the hotels ashore. Therefore when electricity ceased to drive the machines, the world stopped. Telegraph, telephone, and wireless communication ceased. Country was cut off from country, city from city, and neighborhood from neighborhood. Automobiles broke down; street-cars and electric trains refused to run; powerhouses were put out of commission; and at night, save for the flickering light of what lanterns, candles, and oil lamps could be resurrected, cities, towns, and hamlets were smothered in darkness.

I have before me the records of that time. It was ten and eleven o'clock in London, Paris, Berlin, and other continental cities when it happened. Restaurants, theaters, hospitals and private homes were plunged into darkness. Mighty thoroughfares that a moment before had glittered and glowed with thousands of lights and wheeling signs became gloomy canyons where people at first paused, questioned, and later plunged through in terrified clamor. Various men who later wrote their impressions for newspapers and magazines say that the thing which shook their nerves the most was the sudden silence which prevailed when all traffic ceased—that, and five minutes later the maddened cries and groans and curses of men and women fighting like wild beasts to escape from crowded restaurants and theaters.

People coursed through the streets shouting to one another that the power-houses had been blown up, that an earthquake had shaken them down. The most absurd statements were made, tossed from mouth to mouth, and added to the general bewilderment and panic. On the street corners religious fanatics suddenly sprang up, proclaiming that the end of the world had come, and that the sinners had better repent of their sins before it was too late. In the hospitals, nurses and doctors found themselves working under a frightful handicap. Gruesome tales are told of doctors caught in the midst of emergency operations. Because of the darkness it was impossible properly to attend the sick. Whenever available, candles, oil lamps and lanterns were pressed into service; but there were pitifully few of these to be had, and nowhere to turn for more. Telephone wires were dead, and automobiles, cars and busses stalled. To add to the horror, fire broke out in various places. There was no way of ringing in an alarm about them, and the fire apparatus could not have responded if there had been. So the fires spread. And the people of those neighborhoods where the flames leapt to heaven, at last had light—the light of their burning homes.

And then in the midst of all this horror and tumult the denizens of the dark, festering spots of the city crept forth. They swarmed from the filthy alleys and from the dives of the professional criminal, furtive-eyed, predatory; and houses were robbed, men killed, and women assaulted. The police were powerless to act; their mobility was gone; burglar alarms did not warn; and the city lay like a giant Samson shorn of its strength.

So that night passed, not for one city alone, but for hundreds of cities!

2

WHILE all this was happening in the old world, chaos gripped the new.

Across the Atlantic, in the eastern

cities of the United States and Canada, and as far west as Montreal and Chicago, the wheels stopped going at that hour when the workers began to pour forth from the factories and shops, and when the late shopping crowds were thronging the trains and the subways. On the surface cars and on the streets there was, of course, no immediate alarm. Moving-picture and vaudeville houses opened wide their doors, raised the blinds on their windows, and evacuated their patrons in good order. But underground in the various tubes and subways it was a different matter. Hundreds of cars bearing thousands of passengers were stalled in stifling blackness. Guards labored heroically to still the rising hysteria and panic. For perhaps fifteen or twenty minutes—in some cases as long as half an hour—they managed to maintain a species of order. But the great pumps and fans that usually circulated fresh air through the tunnels were no longer functioning. When the foul air fogged the lungs, the passengers went mad. Sobbing and cursing and praying, they fought to escape from the cars, as at the same moment the people of Berlin, Paris and London were fighting to escape from restaurants and theaters. They smashed the windows of the coaches, and in wriggling through them impaled the flesh of their bodies, their hands and faces, on jagged slivers of glass. They trampled each other under foot and flowed in terrified mobs along the right of way, searching madly for exits. In New York alone ten thousand of them perished. They bled to death, were crushed, or died of heart-failure and suffocation.

Above ground the streets and avenues were thronged with millions of human beings trying to get home on foot. For hours dense crowds of workers, shoppers and businessmen filled the highways and byways. Here again panic was caused by the crashing planes. In Montreal the Royal Dominion air liner, Edward VII, en route on a non-stop flight from Halifax to Vancouver with four hundred passengers, fell from a height of three thousand feet onto Windsor Station, killing her own passengers and crew, and blotting out the lives of hundreds of people who were in the station at the time. In New York, Boston and Chicago, where the then new magnetic runabouts were making their initial appearance, hundreds of airplanes plunged to the ground, killing and maiming not only their passengers, but the men, women and children on whom they fell. "It was," states an eye-witness in a book he later wrote called *The Great Debacle*, "a sight fit to appall the stoutest heart. Subway exits were disgorging ghastly mobs of clawing people; a crashing plane had turned a near-by street into a shambles; crowds ran this way and that, shrieking, praying. Everywhere was panic."

Panic indeed! Yet the records show that what they could do, the police and fire departments did. Mounted policemen were utilized to carry candles and oil lamps to hospitals, to scour the countryside for every available horse, and to ride through the city in an effort to calm the people. Firemen were marched to various points of vantage, with axes and chemical containers, to combat any fire that might break out. But in the aggregate these precautions amounted to nothing. Whole hospitals passed the night in darkness; patients died by the hundreds; the flames of myriad fires lit up the sky; and rumors ran from mouth to mouth adding to the terror and chaos.

America, screamed the mobs, was being attacked by a foreign power, maybe Japan. The power-houses had been rendered useless by a powerful magnet. There had been a terrible storm down south; all South America was sinking; North America would go next. No one knew anything; everyone knew something. Nothing

was too wild or absurd for millions to believe. Deprived of their accustomed sources of information, the inhabitants became a prey to their own fancies and the disordered fancies of others. Religious fanatics by the light of huge bonfires preached the second coming of Christ and the destruction of the world. Thousands of hysterical people prostrated themselves on the hard street pavements, babbling, weeping, praying. Thousands of others looted wine and strong drinks from the cellars of hotels and cafés and reeled drunken through the streets, adding to the din and the panic. Nor did daylight bring much relief.

For some obscure reason, all over Europe, Asia, and America, during the hours of daylight, the sky was strangely dulled. Seemingly the sun shone with all its usual splendor, but the air was perceptibly darkened. Why this should be so not even the scientists could tell. Yet even under the light of what millions of people on earth believed to be their last day, human wolves came out of their dens and prowled through the cities, sacking stores and private homes, blowing open safes, and killing and robbing with impunity. The day that succeeded the night was more horrible than the night that preceded the day, because hundreds of thousands of people who had slept through the hours of darkness awoke and joined their fellows on the streets, and because there is something terrible about a big city in which no cars run and no factory whistles blow, in which the machine has died.

And while the cities and the inhabitants thereof were given over to madness and destruction, tragedy took its toll of the skies and stalked the seas. The aircraft of the world were virtually wiped out. Only those escaped which were at rest in their hangars, or which by some miracle of navigation glided safely to earth. Hardly a year passes now but that on some wild mountain peak, or in a gloomy canyon or the heart of the Sahara, fragments of those airships are found. Nor did ocean-going vessels suffer less. In the space of twenty hours, two thousand ships of all classes and tonnage met with disaster —disaster that ultimately wiped out the great firm of Lloyds, in London, and a host of lesser insurance companies. Fifteen hundred steamers vanished, never to be heard of more, thirty-five of these being giant passenger boats carrying upward of twenty thousand passengers. Of the other five hundred ships, some were dashed to pieces on inhospitable coasts, others drifted ashore and broke up, and the remainder were abandoned at sea. The fate of the missing steamers may be partly inferred from what happened to the *Olympia* and the *Orania*. This is taken from the account of the second officer of the former ship:

"The night was clear and starry, a heavy sea running. We were forging full speed ahead about two hundred miles off the Irish coast. Because of our electrically controlled gyroscope, however, the ship was as steady as a rock. A dance was being given in both the first and second class ballrooms, the music for them being supplied by the Metropolitan dance orchestra of London. In the third class theater a television moving-picture was being shown. Couples were walking or sitting on the promenade decks as, though à stiff breeze was blowing, the night was warm. From the bridge I could see the *Orania* coming toward us. She made a wonderful sight, her port-holes gleaming tier on tier, and her deck lights glowing and winking, for all the world looking like a giant glowworm or a fabulous trireme. Doubtless, to watchers on her bridge and decks, we presented the same glorious sight, because we were sister ships, belonging to the same line, and of the same build and tonnage. All the time she was coming

up I conversed with the first officer on her bridge by means of our wireless phone; and it was while in the midst of this conversation, and while we were still a mile apart and he was preparing (so he said) to have the wheel put over so as to take the *Orania* to starboard of us that, without warning, her lights went out.

"Hardly crediting my eyes, I stared at the spot where a moment before she had been. 'What is the matter with you?' I called through my phone, but there was no answer; and even as I realized that the phone had gone dead, I was overcome with the knowledge that my own ship was plunged in darkness. The decks beneath me were black. I could hear the voices of passengers calling out, some in jest and others in rising alarm, questioning what had happened. 'I can't get the engine room; the ship doesn't answer her helm,' I said, facing the captain, who had clambered to the bridge. 'Quick, Mr. Crowley!' he cried. 'Down with you and turn out the crew. Put men at every cabin door and stairway and keep the passengers off the decks.' His voice thundered into the microphone, which repeated his words through loud-speaking devices in every saloon, cabin, and on every deck of the ship—or should have so repeated them if the instruments had been functioning. 'There is no need for alarm. A little trouble to the engines, and incidentally to the dynamos, has caused the lights to go out. I beg of you to be calm. In a half-hour everything will be fixed.' But even as I rushed to obey his orders, even as his crisp voice rang out on the night air, I saw the enormous dark bulk bearing down on us, and the heart leapt in my throat. It was the *Orania*, helpless, without guidance, as were we ourselves, rushing ahead under the momentum acquired by her now stilled engines.

"She struck us, bow on, to one side, shearing through steel plates as if they were so much cheese. At that terrific impact, in the dark and the gloom, all order and discipline were swept away. Something had happened to the gyroscopes, and the ships were pitching and tossing, grinding and crashing against each other, our own ship settling by the head, the stern rising.

"Then ensued a terrible time. The night became hideous with the clamor of terrified voices. Maddened passengers fought their ways to the decks, and to the boats. Crowded boats went down into the surging waves bow on or stern first, spilling their human freight into the sea. Hundreds of passengers, believing that the steamers would at any moment sink, leapt overboard with life-preservers, and in nearly all cases were drowned. All this in the first thirty minutes. After that the panic ebbed; it turned into dull despair. The crews of both steamers, what could be rallied of them, began to control the situation.

"Morning found the *Orania* practically intact, only making water in her No. 1 compartment. The *Olympia* forward compartments were all flooded, taking her down at the head, but the rear eight still held intact, and as long as they did so she could not sink. If the passengers had, from the beginning, remained calm and tractable, hardly a life need have been lost."

The second officer of the *Olympia* goes on to point out that both the giant liners had been thoroughly equipped with the most modern of electro-mechanical devices for use in emergencies; that they carried twin power-receiving engines; that they were electrically steered; and that from the pilot-house and the bridge communication could be had, and orders and instructions given, to crew and passengers in every part of the ships. It was, he points out, the sudden and startling going out of the lights, and the totally unexpected breakdown of all machinery, which

precipitated the tragedy, and not any negligence on the part of the officers and the crews.

Such is the story of one marine disaster; but the records are full of similar accounts, hundreds of them, which it is needless to set down here.

3

On the Pacific coast, especially in the cities of Los Angeles and San Francisco, better order was maintained than in the big cities of the Middle West and the East. Panic there was, loss of life, and damage to property both from fire and theft, but not on so colossal a scale. This was due to the fact that the authorities had several hours of daylight in which to prepare for darkness, and because in the two cities mentioned there were no subways to speak of. In the downtown districts clerks and businessmen were advised to stick to their offices and stores. Policemen, mounted and afoot, were sent to the residential districts and to the factories. Instead of allowing the workers to scatter, they formed them into groups of twenty, deputized, armed, and as nearly as possible set to patrolling the streets of the neighborhoods in which they lived. These prompt measures did much to avert the worst features of the horrors which swept New York and Chicago and the cities of Europe and Asia. But in spite of them the hospitals knew untold suffering, whole city blocks were destroyed by flames, religious frenzy ran high, and millions of people passed the hours of darkness in fear and trembling.

I was twenty-two at that time, living in Altadena, which is a suburb of Pasadena, about twenty miles from Los Angeles, and trying to write. That morning I had taken a book and a lunch and climbed up the Old Pole Road to the top of Mount Echo, intending to return by the cable car which for years has operated from the purple depths of Rubio Canyon to the towering peak. I reached the top of the mountain after a steep climb, ate my lunch on the site of the old Lowe Observatory, and then became absorbed in my book.

The first inkling I had that something was wrong was when the light darkened. "It's clouding over," I thought, looking up, but the sky overhead was perfectly clear, the sun particularly bright.

Not a little disturbed in mind, and thinking, I must admit, of earthquakes, I strolled over to where a group of Mexican section workers, under the supervision of a white boss, had been doing some track repairing. The Mexicans were gesticulating and pointing to the cities and the countryside rolling away far beneath us. Now usually on a clear, sunny day there is a haze in the valley and one can not see for very many miles in any direction. But on this day there was an unwonted clarity in the air. Everything on which we gazed was sharply etched—no blurring, no fogging of lines. The houses stood out starkly; so did the spires of churches and the domes of public buildings. Though it was miles away to the westward, the mighty tower of the Los Angeles city hall could be plainly seen. The light had darkened, yes; but the effect was that of gazing through slightly tinted glasses.

"What do you think it means?" I asked the track boss. But before he could make a reply, a Mexican cried out volubly, pointing one shaking hand up the steep ridge which rose behind us and crossing himself rapidly with the other.

It was an awe-inspiring sight on which we gazed. Over Mount Lowe a luminous, dancing light was growing. I did not know it then, but as far east as Denver and Omaha, and as far south as St. Louis and Galveston, men saw that light. Seen from the western cities of Calgary and Edmonton in Canada it was a pillar of blue flame

growing out of the earth and, as the hours passed, mounting higher and higher into the heavens. Millions of eyes from all over the United States and the Dominion fearfully and superstitiously turned toward that glow. As night deepened upon the Pacific coast, the inhabitants of Southern California saw the sky to the north of them cloven asunder by a leaping sword. No wonder millions of people thought that the heavens had opened and Christ was coming.

But before night I had descended the steep slope of Mount Echo and walked the trackway into Altadena. Women and men called to me from doorways and wanted to know if there was a forest fire farther back in the hills. I could give them no answer. On Lake Avenue I saw the automobiles, street-cars, and motor-busses stranded.

"What is the matter?" I asked a conductor.

"I don't know," he said. "There isn't any power. They say all the power plants and machinery have stopped. A man rode through from downtown a few minutes ago and told us so."

I walked on into Pasadena. Everything was tied up. The streets were jammed with cars and people. Owing to the state ordinance which made it a penal offense for planes to fly over any Californian city—the air routes were so arranged, and the landing-stations and fields outside the cities, access to them being had by fast electric trains—the horror of airships falling on crowded city streets and on residences was entirely averted. People spoke, however, of having seen a huge air liner and some smaller pleasure planes plunging to earth to the west of them, turning over and over; and afterward I learned that the New York-Los Angeles special, which had just taken the air, had crashed into an orchard with a terrible loss of life.

I went no farther than Madison Street on Colorado Boulevard and turned back. It was ominous to look from the windows and porches of the big house that night and see the city black and formless beneath us. Usually the horizon to the west and south was illuminated for thirty miles around. Now, save for the dull glare of several fires, the darkness was unbroken.

Everything that happened that night is printed indelibly on my memory. Far off, like the sound of surf beating on a rocky shore, we could hear the voice of the mob. It rose and fell, rose and fell. And once we heard the crackle of what we took to be machine-gun fire. In the Flintridge district, I heard later, houses were sacked and looted. Some men defending their homes were murdered and several women badly treated. But in Altadena, up in the foothills, no one suffered any violence. Only once were we alarmed by a procession marching up Lake Avenue, bearing torches and chanting hymns. It was a body of religious fanatics, Holy Rollers, men, women, and children, on their way to Mount Wilson, the better to wait the advent of Jesus. We could hear them shouting and singing, and in the flickering light of the torches, see them frothing at the mouth. They went by, and after that, save for a patrol from the sheriff's office, we saw no one until morning.

Dawn came, but if anything the tension and terror grew greater. All night the threatening simitar of light over the mountains had grown taller and taller—one could see it literally growing—and the sinister brightness of it radiated like molten steel, nor did the coming of daylight dim its radiance.

None of us had slept during the night; none of us had thought of sleep. Haggard-faced we greeted the dawn, and with despair in our hearts realized that the light of day was perceptibly dimmer than it had been the day before. Could this actually be the end of the world? Were those

poor fanatics who had gone by in the night right, and were the heavens opening, as they said? These, and more, were the thoughts that ran through my mind. Then—came the end!

It was 6 p. m. in London, 1 p. m. in New York, and 10 o'clock a. m. on the coast when it happened. Millions of people saw the pillar of light waver. For one pregnant moment it grew red-hot, with the crimson redness of heated iron. From its lofty summit jagged forks of lightning leapt across the heavens and blinded the sight of those that watched. Then it vanished, was gone; and a few minutes after its going the street lights came on, the day brightened, telephone bells rang, wheels turned, and the twenty or so hours of terror and anarchy were ended!

4

WHAT had been the cause of it all? No one knew. Learned men puzzled their heads over the problem. Scientists were baffled for an adequate answer. Many explanations were advanced, of course, but none of them held water. For a while there was a tendency on the part of various governments to suspect one another of having invented and utilized a fiendish machine for the undoing of rival nations. However, this suspicion was speedily dropped when it was realized how world-wide had been the nature of the disaster. Dr. LeMont of the Paris Astronomical League advanced the theory that the spots on the sun had something to do with the phenomenon; Doolittle of the Royal Academy of Science in London was of the opinion that the Cosmic Ray discovered by Millikan in 1928 was responsible; while others not so highly placed in the world of science as these two outstanding celebrities suggested anything from a dark comet, a falling meteor, to disturbances in the magnetic centers of the earth. The *Encyclopedia Britannica* for 1962, twenty-one years after the disaster which nearly wrecked civilization and perhaps the world, quotes the above theories in detail, and many more besides, but winds up with the assertion that nothing authentic as to the cause of the tragedy of 1941 has ever been forthcoming. This assertion is not true. In the fall of 1948 there was placed before the Royal Academy of Science in Canada evidence as to the origin of the great catastrophe sufficient to call forth an extended investigation on the part of that body.

Though eighteen years have passed since then, the results of that investigation have never been made public. I will not speculate as to the reason for that. In the interim a report was made of the matter to the Smithsonian Institution in Washington, to the Royal Academy of Science in London, and to the Paris Astronomical League in France—a report which these learned bodies chose to ignore. And what was the evidence the Royal Academy of Science in Canada investigated?

As I have already stated, I was in California in 1941 and lived through one phase of the great disaster. Three years later—in the summer of 1944—having broken into the pages of some of the better class magazines with my stories, I made a trip to western Canada for the purpose of writing a series of stories for a western journal. It was there, miles from any city and in the foothills of the Rockies, that I met and listened to the story of the dying recluse. He was a young man, I judged, not a whit older than myself, but in the last stages of consumption.

I came upon the ranch-house—a four-room cabin made of split logs and undressed stone—after a hard day's ride. I pitched my tent on the banks of a tumbling mountain stream about a quarter of a mile from the house, and gladly accepted the invitation of the comely young mistress of the place

to take dinner with them that evening. She was, I gleaned, the sick man's sister. Her husband, now absent rounding up cattle, was proving up on an adjoining quarter section, having already done so on two others in his wife's and brother-in-law's names.

After dinner I sat on the wide veranda with the sick man, whose sleeping-porch I surmised it was, talking with him and smoking my pipe.

"Visitors are rare out this way," he said, "and an educated man a godsend."

I was surprized to find him a man of no little education himself.

"You went to college?" I hazarded.

"Yes, McGill. I took my B. A. And after that, two years of medicine."

Over the plains the sun had sunk in red splendor below the horizon and the sky was on fire with its reflected glory. Nearer in I saw a ragged black splotch on the billowing earth, burnt-looking, charred.

"A prairie fire," I not so much questioned as stated.

The invalid, propped up on his couch, followed my finger with his cavernous black eyes.

"No," he said. "No. That is where *it*—was."

"It?" I queried.

"Yes," he replied; "what the papers called the pillar of fire."

Then I remembered, of course. The burnt splotch was the place where the terrible luminous glow, the cleaving sword I had seen over Mount Lowe, had had its source. I stared, fascinated.

"Nothing," said the man on the couch, "will grow there—since then. The soil has no life in it—no life. It is," he said faintly, "like ashes—black ashes."

Silence fell between us for many minutes. The shadows lengthened and the twilight deepened. It was mournful sitting there in the growing gloom, and I felt relieved when the woman turned on the light in the sitting-room and its cheerful rays flooded through the open windows and the doorway. Finally the invalid said:

"I was here at the time. My sister and her husband were absent on a visit to his folks in Calgary."

"It must have been a stupendous sight," I remarked for want of a better thing to say.

"It was hell," he said. "That's how I got this," tapping himself on the chest and bringing on a fit of coughing. "The air," he gasped; "it was hard on the lungs."

His sister came out and gave him some medicine from a black bottle.

"You mustn't talk so much, Peter; it isn't good for you," she admonished.

He waved an impatient hand, "Let be!" he said. "Let be! What difference does it make? In another day, another week——"

His voice trailed away and then picked up again on a new sentence.

"Oh, don't pity me! Don't waste your pity on the likes of me! If ever a wretch deserved his fate, I deserve mine. Three years now I've suffered the tortures of the damned. Not of flesh alone, but of mind. When I could still walk about it wasn't so bad; but since I've been chained to this bed I've done nothing but think, think. . . . I think of the great disaster; of the hours of terror and despair known by millions of people. I think of the thousands and thousands of men, women and children trapped in subways and theaters, trampled to death, butchered, murdered. I visualize the hospitals full of the sick and the dying, the giant liners of the air and of the ocean crashing, colliding, going down into the sea; and I seem to hear the screams and the pitiful prayers for help of the maddened passengers. Tell me, what fate should befall the fiend who would loose such wo and misery on an unsuspecting world?"

"There, there," I said soothingly,

thinking him delirious, judging his mind unhinged from too much morbid brooding. "It was frightful, of course, but no one could help what happened—no one."

But my words did not calm him. On the contrary they added to his excitement. "That isn't true," he gasped. "It isn't true. No, no, sister, I won't be still, I'm not raving! Give me a drop of brandy—so; and bring me the little cedar box from the cupboard over there."

She complied with his request.

"It's all written down and put away in here," he said, tapping the box. "Put away in here, along with the third crystal which came home in the saddle-bag of John's runaway horse."

His eyes were like two black coals fastened on my face.

"I've told no one," he said tensely, "but I can't keep silent any longer. I must speak! I must!"

One of his feverish hands gripped my own. "Don't you understand?" he cried. "I'm the fiend who caused the great world disaster. God help me! I, and one other!

"No, no," he said, correctly reading the look on my face, "I'm not crazy, I'm not raving. It is God's truth I'm telling you, and the evidence of it is in this cedar box. It began in Montreal when I was going to McGill University. The underprofessor of physics there was a young French-Canadian by the name of John Cabot. He——"

A fit of coughing stopped his voice. His sister gave him a sip of water.

"Peter," she pleaded, "let it go for tonight. Tomorrow——"

But he shook his head. "I may be dead tomorrow. Let me talk now." His eyes sought mine. "Did you ever hear about the meteorite that fell back in Manitoba in 1930?"

"No."

"Nor about the seven crystals that were found in it?"

"I don't remember."

"Well, they were found," he said; "seven of them as large as grapefruit. There's nothing remarkable about finding crystals in a meteorite. That has been done before and since. But those seven crystals were not ordinary ones. They were perfectly rounded and polished, as if by hand. Nor was that all: at the core of each of them was a vibrant fluid, and in that fluid was a black spot——"

A spasm of coughing choked his utterance, and this time I joined with his sister in urging him to rest, but desisted when I saw that such advice, and any effort on my part to withdraw, only succeeded in adding to his painful excitement.

"A black spot," he gasped, "that danced and whirled and was never still. Don't try to stop me! I must tell you about it! The scientists of the world were all agog over them. Where, they asked, had the meteor come from, and what were the fluid and the spot at the center of each crystal? In the course of time the crystals were sent various places for observation and study. One went to England, another to France, two to Washington, while the remaining three stayed in Canada, finally coming to rest in the Museum of Natural Science in Montreal which, as everyone knows, was erected in 1929 and is now under the jurisdiction of McGill University.

"It was during my first year at medical school that I entered the museum one afternoon, almost by accident. The sight of the crystals, newly exhibited, fascinated me. I could hardly tear myself away in time for a lecture.

"The next afternoon I came again. I watched the black spots dancing in their vibrant fluid. Sometimes they would whirl in the center of the liquid with monotonous regularity. Then suddenly they would dash at the walls which held them in and circle them with inconceivable speed. Was it my

imagination, or did the specks take on shape or form? Were they prisoners forever beating their heads against the bars of a cell, seeking to be free? Engrossed in such thoughts I did not know that another had entered the museum until a voice addressed me.

"'So you have come under their spell, too, Ross.'

"I looked up with a start and recognized John Cabot. We knew each other, of course, because I had studied under him for two years.

"'They look so life-like, sir,' I replied. 'Haven't you noticed it?'

"'Perhaps,' he said quietly, 'they are life.'

"The thought stirred my imagination.

"'You know,' he went on, 'that there are scientists who claim life originally came to the earth from some other star, perhaps from outside the universe entirely. Maybe,' he said, 'it came, even as these crystals came, in a meteor.'"

The sick man paused and moistened his lips with water.

"That," he said, "was the beginning of the intimacy which sprang up between John Cabot and me. It was often possible for Cabot to take one of the crystals to his room, and then we would foregather there and ponder the mystery of it. Cabot was a sound teacher of physics, but he was more than that. He was a scientist who was also a speculative philosopher, which meant being something of a mystic. Have you ever studied mysticism? No? Then I can't tell you about that. Only from him and his speculations I struck fire. How can I describe it? Perhaps gazing in the crystal hypnotized us both. I don't know as to that. Only night and day both of us became eaten with an overwhelming curiosity.

"'What do the scientists say is inside the crystals?' I asked Cabot.

"'They don't say,' he replied. 'They don't know. A message from Mars, perhaps, or from beyond the Milky Way.'

"From beyond the Milky Way," whispered the sick man. "Can't you see what that would mean to our imaginations?"

He beat the quilt that covered him with his hand.

"It meant," he said, "the forbidden. We dreamed of doing what the scientists of America and Europe said they hesitated to do for fear of the consequences—or for fear of destroying objects valuable to science. We dreamed of breaking the crystal!"

A big moth fluttered into the radius of light and the dying man followed it with his eyes. "That's what we were, Cabot and I, though we didn't know it; moths, trying to reach a searing flame."

By this time I was engrossed in his story. "What then?" I prompted.

"We stole the crystals! Perhaps you read about it at the time?"

I shook my head.

"Well, it was in all the papers."

I explained that in those days I had seldom seen a paper from one week's end to another. He nodded feebly.

"That accounts for it, then. The theft caused a sensation in university circles, and both Cabot and I were thoroughly questioned and searched. But we had been too clever!" The sick man laughed mirthlessly. "God help us! too clever! What wouldn't I give now," cried Peter Ross bitterly, "if we had been discovered! But a malignant fate ordered otherwise. We were successful. During the holidays I took the crystal home with me, home, to these hills and plains. Later Cabot joined me."

He broke off for a moment as if exhausted.

"I wonder," he said, after a few minutes, "if I can make what we felt and thought clear to you. It wasn't just idle curiosity that was driving us. No! It was more than that. Out of the unknown itself had come a

meteor with a message for mankind. Something stupendous was hidden in the cores of those crystals. Yet what had the scientists of the world done? They had contented themselves with weighing the crystals, looking at them under a microscope, photographing them, writing learned articles about them, and then putting them away on museum shelves! None of them—not one; or so it seemed to us—had had the courage to open a crystal. Their reasons—deadly germs, virulent forms of life, terrific explosions—we dismissed as cowardly vaporings. The time had come, we said, to investigate more thoroughly. God help us," whispered Peter Ross, "we blinded ourselves to what might be the consequences of our rash experiment! We eased our consciences with the reflection that we were safeguarding humanity from any danger by carrying it out in the wilderness, miles from any city or human habitation. If there were to be any martyrs, we thought egotistically, it would be us alone. We had, of course, no inkling of the terrible force we were about to loose.

"Early in the morning of the day of the disaster we rode from this place down there to the plains, down to where you saw that charred splotch. We had with us a portable outfit of chemical instruments. It was our intention to smash one of the crystals, catch the fluid in our test-tubes, isolate the black spot, and make an analysis of it and the liquid later. But we never did," he said; "we never did."

A cough rattled in his throat.

"It was Cabot who broke the crystal. Before noon, it was, but I'm not sure of the time. He knew how to do it; he had all the tools necessary. The crystal lay inside a metal container. I tell you there was something uncanny about it glimmering in the sun! The black spot was whirling madly, dashing itself with violence against the restraining walls as if it sensed that freedom was near.

" 'Look at him,' said Cabot tensely. 'Look at him leaping and kicking. What a dancer! What a—in a minute now and he'll be out of that!'

"Perhaps it was the phrase; perhaps it was the masculine pronoun used in connection with the black spot; but suddenly I was afraid of the thing we would do. Fearful possibilities ran through my mind.

" 'John,' I cried, stepping back several paces, 'John, don't!'

"But Cabot never heard me. His hand went up with the heavy hammer.

"Poor John! Nothing warned him—nothing stayed him!

"The blow came down. I heard the tinkling crash; then——

" 'Oh my God!'

"It was Cabot's voice in a shrill scream of unutterable horror and agony. His bent figure straightened up, and from his hair and his outflung arms blue lights crackled and streamed, and all around his body a column of something shimmered and shifted and grew. So for a moment he postured; then he began to dance. I tell you he began to dance, not by any force or power that resided in his own limbs, but as if he were jerked or writhed about by an external agent. I saw what that agent was. It was the black spot! Out of the ground it rose like an evil jinnee and took on the form and shape of something monstrous, inhuman, horrible. It leapt and whirled; and yes, though I couldn't hear it, it sang and shouted. It was the nucleus of an increasing body of light. I felt searing heat scorch my cheeks and burn my throat with every breath I drew. More! I felt that streaming fingers of light were reaching out at me, clutching.

"With a sob of fear I turned and ran. Cabot's horse had broken loose and was running wildly across the plains. My own was plunging madly

at the end of its picket rope. Somehow I mounted and fled, but after several miles of such flight my horse put its hoof in a prairie-dog hole and broke its leg, pitching me over its head.

"How long I lay dead to the world I don't know; but the long shadows were running eastward when I came to. The air was acrid and bitter. With fearful eyes I saw that the day was unaccountably dark and that the pillar of fire out on the plains had grown to immense proportions. Even as I gazed on it, it grew. Hour after hour it grew, adding to its circumference and height. From the four corners of the horizon, in mighty arches that dipped to a common center, flowed infinitesimal particles of what seemed golden dust. I know now that all the electricity was being sucked out of the air, darkening the day, blackening the night, and rendering all machinery useless. But then I knew only that the pillar of fire, the center to which those particles cohered, was drawing nearer and nearer to where I lay. For I could barely move, my feet seemed like lead, and there was a tight band round my chest.

"Perhaps I was delirious, out of my head; I do not know, but I got on my feet and walked and walked, and when I couldn't walk I crawled. Hours and hours I crawled, driven ahead by a growing horror of the nightmare that pursued me; yet when I stopped, exhausted, I was still far away from the foothills and the pillar of fire was nearer than ever. I could see the monstrous black thing inside of it dancing and whirling. My God! It was reaching out dark streamers of fire after me; it was calling out that it wanted me, that it would have me, that nothing this side of heaven or hell could keep it from me; and as it shot this implacable message into my senses, it grew bigger, it danced faster, and it came closer.

"Again I staggered to my feet and ran. Late night found me several miles below here, quenching my thirst at a spring of water which trickles from the side of a rock. I looked back, and the pillar of fire was now so high that it lost itself in the heavens. All around me played a livid light, a light that flung the shape of a gigantic dancing horror this way and that. Did I tell you that this light was like a pillar? Yes, it was like a pillar whose middle swelled out in a great arc; and I knew that I was doomed, that I could not escape, and swooning horror overcame me and I fell to the ground and buried my face in my hands.

"Hours passed—or was it only minutes? I can not say. I could feel my body writhing, twisting. Every atom of my flesh was vibrating to an unnatural rhythm. I was crazy, yes, out of my head, delirious, but I swear to you that I heard John Cabot crying to me, imploring, 'For God's sake, break the crystal, break the crystal!' and I cried back into my huddled arms, not speaking, yet screaming it, 'We broke the crystal! God help us! We broke the crystal!'

"Then suddenly it came to me that he meant the second crystal. Yes, yes, I understood. The fiendish thing out there on the plain was seeking, not me, but its counterpart.

"The second crystal was in the knapsack still swung on my back. With insane fury I tore it out of its padded, protected housing and whirled it over my head. Filled with loathing of the terrible thing, I flung it from me as far as the strength of my arm would permit. Perhaps twenty yards away it crashed into a rock and was shattered to pieces. I saw the slivers of it glint and flash; then from the spot where it struck rose a column of light, and in the column of light was a whirling speck. Like its predecessor it grew and grew, and as it grew, receded from me in

the direction of the mightier pillar whirling and calling. How can I tell you of the weird dance of the evil ones? They sang to each other, and I know the song they sang, but I can not tell it to you because it was not sung in words.

"At what hour they came together, whether it was day or night, I do not know. Only I saw them merge. With their coming together the terrible power that was sucking in the world's electrical forces to one gigantic center became neutralized. The heavens split open as the bolts of lightning devastated the sky. Through the rent firmament I saw a black shape cleave its way. Whatever had been in the two crystals was leaving the earth, was plunging through the Milky Way, through the incalculable spaces beyond the reach of our most powerful telescopes, back, back. . . ."

Two days later, in a grave beside the tumbling mountain stream, his brother-in-law and I buried all that was mortal of Peter Ross. Over his resting-place we piled a great cairn of rocks so that the spring floods might not wash his body away nor coyotes worry the tomb of the dead. When I parted with the bereaved sister, she pressed me to accept the cedar box.

"Poor Peter!" she said. "Toward the last he ran a fever all the time and was delirious; but he wanted you to have the box, and so you must take it."

I saw that she attached no importance to his story.

"He never mentioned it before," she said; "he was out of his head."

And so I was inclined to believe until I examined the contents of the box. Then I changed my mind. If what he told us had been naught but the result of morbid brooding and delirium, then he must have been morbid and delirious for years preceding his death, because the written version of his story began simply, "It is nearly a year now since," and was a bare recital of facts, written plainly and in the manner of a man with no especial gift for expressing himself in words. Nor was that all. Besides the manuscript mentioned were revealed various letters which I perused, letters from Cabot to Ross, Ross to Cabot, covering a period of years and telling of their ideas and plans and of the theft of the crystals. The whole story, save for its denouement, could be pieced together from those letters.

Incredible as Peter Ross's tale had sounded in the telling, wild and incoherent though it had been, and colored with fever and delirium, none the less it was true. And as if to rout whatever disbelief might be still lurking in my mind, I saw that which finally led me to place the whole matter before the Royal Academy of Science in Canada, and before various other scientific bodies, as I have recorded; and which in this latter day, so that mankind may be warned against the menace imprisoned in the crystals, has made me put everything down here: the crowning evidence of all. For in the bottom of the box was a round object; and when I picked it up my fascinated eyes were held by a transparent bubble the size of an orange with a black spot at its core, dancing, dancing. . . .

THE BLACK MONARCH

BY PAUL ERNST

"With the quickness of light the two monsters were coiled around each other."

1. *The Blue Diamonds*

STEPPING to the deck rail, Neal Emory stared down at the black water that foamed along the wall of the ship's hull. As he gazed, he gripped the protecting rail with both hands, and held himself a few inches away from it as though fearful of losing his balance and going over. His nervousness, under the circumstances, was natural. He had just had a narrow escape from falling into that fathomless black water!

Restlessly he moved away and began to pace up and down the deserted promenade, pressing his hands to his temples now and then in an effort to relieve the ache that persisted there. He felt as if he had recently waked from a coma induced by drugs, instead of from a supposedly normal slumber. His nerves were raw and jerky, his eyes smarted as though there were sand in them, and his head throbbed painfully with every beat of his heart. It was a curious physical discomfort to have been brought on by so tenuous a thing as a dream.

But then, he mused, it had been a curious dream; though he hardly knew whether to define it as that—he could remember no scenes or events

such as usually can be recalled after a nightmare. It was all vague, formless. It had been less like a dream than like a distant command coming to him over the desolate noises of creaking timbers and swishing drapes always to be heard on a steamer at the dead of night in mid-ocean.

All he could call to mind of it now was a dim recollection of struggling against some power, some intangible force, that strove to make him go somewhere he did not want to go. He could remember hanging back against the power that hauled at him, but could not remember what the power itself might be. He recalled that a hand had seemed to clutch his own and pull him forward, but there was no rememberable substance or shape to the clutching hand. There was nothing to fasten to, save the fact that suddenly in his sleep he had felt himself moving, moving, in spite of all his efforts to stand still.

An uncomfortable sensation of cramp in his right shoulder had waked him—to discover himself in an alarming position.

He was standing on a chair by the open port-hole of his stateroom. His head and left shoulder were crowded through the aperture so that he was looking directly down into the water that fell away from the ship in her rapid flight; and he was trying mechanically to force his right shoulder also through the narrow opening. His left arm was groping down as though inspired by a will of its own to dominate the rest of his body and lead it to the oblivion below. Altogether it was fortunate that he had been aroused by the pressure of the sharp brass casement against his shoulder. Small as the port-hole was, he might easily have succeeded in forcing his way through!

It had been a strange nightmare with possibilities of a tragic end. Probably, he had told himself, it was the outcome of too much brooding over his father's recent death. He must mingle more with the other passengers, try to divert his mind as he had intended when he booked passage on the Mediterranean cruise. And attempting thus to explain the incident and dismiss it from his thoughts he had partly dressed, thrown a heavy coat around his shoulders, and walked out here on the deserted deck to see if he could get rid of the headache that had come with his odd dream.

It wasn't until a little later that he had remembered a peculiar thing, a trivial but puzzling detail: Although he was almost helplessly right-handed in every move he made, the arm that had groped through the port-hole first had been his left arm. The hand that had assumed the initiative and led the rest of his body, contrary to a lifetime of habit, had been his left hand. It was a small riddle to obsess his mind in the face of the graver fact that he had very nearly committed suicide in his sleep, but nevertheless it persisted.

Stopping under a deck light he raised the offending left hand and stared at it as though he thought to remark a change in it, a difference from its fellow that might explain the puzzle. As he made the move, a ring on his little finger glittered faintly as it caught and reflected the dull illumination.

It was an odd piece of jewelry consisting of a flat-cut, oblong stone of deepest indigo blue like a tiny bit of polished night sky, held in a heavy gold mounting formed of two coiled snakes. The stone, peculiarly attractive in its dark, almost sullen shading, was a blue diamond.

After a few moments of brisk pacing, the cool night breeze cleared his head somewhat; and, feeling more himself, he leaned against the rail and lit a cigarette.

As he stood there a man approached him at a rapid walk, gazed at and through him, and thudded by, having paid him no more attention than if he

had been part of the deck rail. For an instant Neal had the curious illusion that he was no thicker than a shadow, a transparent substance through which one could look at will. While he was shrugging aside this uncomfortable sensation the other went by again and he noticed him more clearly.

He was unacquainted with him personally, but he recognized him at sight as a certain Professor Eden Sanderson who was supposed to be something of a mystery. On every hand he had overheard gossip about the eccentric professor. He had heard fabulous descriptions of his great bulk; vague reports of his brilliance as a scientist, though no one seemed able to place his name precisely; and puzzled speculation as to why so virile a man should keep himself shut up in his cabin so secretively. Everybody, it seemed, was wondering who he was and why he was so seclusive. Neal, sunk in reminiscences of his father's tragedy, had appeared to be the only one aboard who had no curiosity concerning him. The giant professor was placed at his table in the salon; but beyond noticing idly that he had never taken a meal there in spite of the perfect weather, he had not thought twice about the man. Now here he was, taking advantage of the lateness of the hour to tramp in seclusion along the promenade deck.

Certainly, Neal confessed to himself, he was a figure to provoke curiosity!

Gossip had said that he was unusually large, and gossip had not exaggerated. He was one of the biggest human beings Neal had ever seen. Himself just short of six feet in height, he looked up at the massive bare head and felt like a pigmy in comparison. The spread of the man's shoulders was correspondingly enormous, and they rolled alternately forward with the swing of his heavy arms as though he were continually breaking a path through waist-high snow drifts. In spite of the cold his throat was bare, and a fringe of heavy black hair showed at the base of his neck where it matted up from his thick chest. His hands were bare, too, and on the backs of them was more spiky black hair. His face was covered with stiff, blue-black beard, in striking contrast with his light gray, brooding eyes. Yet the intangible air of uncleanliness that sometimes comes with a superabundance of body hair was not at all in evidence. He looked as clean as a north gale—and as irresistible.

There was agitation in his tread as he walked; now and again his stiff black eyebrows met in a line over his light eyes; and his lips moved as if he were mumbling to himself.

Then abruptly, a few paces from Neal, he stopped as though he had run against a wall—and there started a struggle as odd as it was inexplicable.

An enormous force seemed suddenly to gather from thin air and shove his great body toward the deck rail! It was as though a thousand shadowy hands were crowding to press him forward—as though a soundless hurricane beat steadily at him until his huge frame was weak in its grip.

There wasn't a human being in sight in either direction. The deck around them was absolutely empty. Yet in that seemingly empty space *something* gripped the big body with ever increasing violence! Neal could hear his heavy breathing, and see sweat glisten on his straining neck as he resisted it. Under the unseen pressure his arms were rigid as bars. His back arched in a quivering half-circle as he braced himself against the thing that bore him nearer and nearer to the deck's edge and the black water beneath.

And then, just as Neal had recovered a little from the first paralysis of his amazement and was about to run to help him, the struggle ceased as abruptly as it had started. Whatever it was that had threatened re-

leased its grip. The professor clung weakly to the rail and panted.

A moment later he straightened with a jerk, brought his left hand up before his eyes, and looked at it intently. With the move, Neal saw something glitter on his third finger. And for one astounding instant he had a clear glimpse of what the glittering thing was!

It was a ring, consisting of a flat-cut, oblong stone of deepest indigo blue, held in a heavy gold mounting molded in the semblance of two coiled serpents. As nearly as he could tell in the uncertain light, it was an exact duplicate of his own blue diamond ring!

Still breathing heavily, the professor looked at the dark stone as though he were regarding a deadly thing—as a man might stare at a poisonous snake that held him powerless in a hypnotic trance.

With an exclamation he suddenly tore it from his finger and threw it over the deck rail. It fell in a dully gleaming arc, dropping with a slight splash inaudible in the hissing foam of the ship's progress. An instant he stood there, turning his head slowly to watch the spot where the ring had disappeared. Then he squared his heavy shoulders, sighed with a relief that seemed tinged a little with doubt, and walked from the promenade.

Neal relaxed his tense body and went slowly to his stateroom, reviewing the enigmatic scene he had just witnessed. Now, with the arched body no longer straining before his eyes, he began to wonder exactly what it was that he had seen; and he found it hard to believe that he had watched a struggle at all. It had seemed at the moment like a conflict between two powerful wrestlers, one of whom was invisible. But this was nothing but imagination. What had there been to fight against? Only empty air! Yet the professor had braced his arms and swelled his muscles as though a dozen men were combined against him—pushing him toward the rail and death in the ocean below.

Finally, as he dwelt on the weird event, he decided that the fellow must be afflicted with epilepsy; though this theory didn't explain why he should throw away a valuable ring. Sitting down on the bed, he looked at the ring on his own hand, twisting it in his fingers so the light gleamed sullenly from the flat blue surface. Had the professor's ring been an actual duplicate, or had he been deceived in the poor light? It seemed impossible that there should be a mate to his blue diamond. . . .

It had belonged originally to a friend of his father's, Jim Arfield, chief engineer of the North African Construction Company, who had picked it up somewhere in the Orient. Five years ago Arfield had died in engineering disgrace—brought low by the failure of one of his smallest and most insignificant jobs. A bridge over a low gully had collapsed under a trainload of passengers. It seemed as though any student engineer might have designed the simple thing; but Arfield, with forty years of complicated engineering monuments to his credit, had fallen down on this commonplace job and had come home to live out the last few years of his useless life. He had acquired the blue diamond ring shortly before designing the bridge that so unaccountably went wrong.

He had given the ring to Emory Senior just before he died. Neal remembered the date, the third of August, 1947, clearly enough—for it was just at this time that his father began the series of political mistakes that had so astounded all who knew him. For no reason that anyone could discover, he became a changed man. He turned from a brilliant politician into that most dangerous of persons—an egomaniac in a position of power. And he had crowned his life with five years of inexcusable blunders that had

ruined his career, swept away most of his fortune, caused a wave of financial unrest along the whole Atlantic seaboard, and finally brought about his murder by an ally who had been wrecked in the general crash.

Both his father and Arfield had happened to acquire the blue diamond at about the time when disaster marked them down. It was mere coincidence, of course. The stone itself could hold no significance. It was too fantastic to suppose that a lump of carbon could influence a man's actions in any way. . . .

He shifted his thoughts, and turned off the light. He must stop thinking of the past. Already such brooding had caused him to walk in his sleep. Toward the open port-hole. Left hand first. Curious that his left hand should have taken precedence over his right. . . .

At length he dropped off to sleep.

When he woke next morning he found that the weather had changed. The sky was gray, and a wind whistled from the east that heeled the ship with its force and piled up waves that hourly grew higher. By nightfall the motion of the ship was extreme. Less than a dozen passengers came to the salon for dinner. It was perhaps because of the prevailing air of desertion that Professor Sanderson chose that evening to take his first meal outside the solitude of his cabin.

Neal regarded him dubiously as he lowered his weight into the chair opposite. A man of his colossal size with a suspected strain of mental queerness was not too comfortable a dinner partner! But the bearded face seemed composed enough now, and the light gray eyes were clear with calm reason and perfect health.

In view of his reputation of being a rather sulky hermit, Neal hesitated to address him for a moment; but the scientist nodded slightly as he met his gaze, and seemed not at all apt to resent attempts at acquaintance. He appeared to be an entirely different person from the harassed being of the evening before. Neal made a tentative overture.

"You're one of a very few," he commented, waving around at the empty dining-salon. "Yesterday I overheard several of our fellow passengers mention this as their twenty-fourth voyage, and I see none of them here tonight. You are used to the sea, I suppose?"

"I have never been on a ship before," answered the professor, and the air seemed to quiver visibly in time to the slow vibrations of his heavy voice. "I have always been too busy in my laboratory to do much traveling."

He beckoned to one of the stewards.

"My usual dinner," he rumbled. "The head steward will tell you what it is."

For a time there was silence as he approached his special meal with a hearty but guarded appetite. Neal found himself looking at an array of food that guided his mind back to the training-table of his college days. In comparison with the older man's scientifically balanced meal, his own standard dinner seemed luxurious.

"You must be an athlete," he remarked at last.

The professor shook his shaggy head. "No," he said pleasantly. "At least not in the sense you probably mean. I eat carefully, as you see, because I must keep myself in the best of physical shape in order to accomplish my mission."

The silence that followed was only awkward because Neal made it so. The professor went on eating as placidly as though he had said nothing in the least unusual.

"Your — mission?" Neal repeated at last.

At the tone of his voice the professor glanced up with a slight smile.

"Oh, I'm not a missionary," he said. "My activities are entirely scientific — though it is possible that

some people might class them as religious."

Astronomy was the only branch of science Neal could think of as remotely to be classed with religion. He called to mind accounts he had read of distant observatories placed in the purer air of tropic islands and desert places.

"You're on your way to some astronomical post, perhaps?" he inquired.

"No. My work doesn't concern the heavens either literally or figuratively," answered Professor Sanderson. "I said it might be termed religious, in a sense, because it has to do with good and evil. Particularly evil!"

"That does sound as if it left the realms of science," Neal murmured.

"Not at all. Evil—and its destruction—are purely matters for science to deal with, if only people knew it. . . ." The professor halted as though regretting his loquacity, and turned his attention to eating.

"The destruction of evil?" Neal repeated at last. "That is an odd word to use in such a connection. I have always thought of evil as a thing to be *eradicated,* perhaps by education, perhaps by punishment of evil-doers. It never occurred to me that it was a thing tangible enough to be—destroyed."

"Neither has it occurred to anyone else, outside of myself and another," was the answer. "But just a little thought serves to explain the puzzle readily. But perhaps you are not interested. . . ."

"I am quite interested," said Neal, truthfully enough.

"To begin with," said the professor, still looking as though he rather regretted the initial loquacity that had started him on the subject, "the world is governed by an abstract good intelligence that is constantly being attacked by an abstract evil intelligence. This is an old truth. Men have known it, or felt it, since they walked on two legs. They have called the good influence by many names. Also they have branded the evil intelligence in many ways. Devil is our name for the latter, for instance."

He glanced covertly at Neal as though to see how his words were being received, then continued.

"Another thing that is common knowledge is that this abstract good intelligence has occasionally been embodied in human form. Now and then a great personage arises who is somehow linked directly with the benevolent influence that shapes the universe. There have been several examples of this.

"So far does the knowledge of man extend. But the corollary to these truths has been somewhat overlooked, I think. For, if the good influence can be personified and made tangible, there is nothing to prevent the evil intelligence from undergoing the same process and becoming an incarnate thing. And once made tangible, it follows that there is nothing to prevent science from locating and destroying it."

He calmly replenished his glass with mineral water.

"Then according to your theory——" Neal began. But the professor bristled a little at the word, as though it had been thrown at him on some painful occasion, perhaps in connection with this very subject on which he was discoursing.

"Theory!" he rumbled. "Theory! I am not giving idle suppositions merely to make pleasant conversation. This is no theory—it has grown beyond that into actual fact! By my efforts, and those of a brilliant man who is now dead, it has been definitely proved that the evil intelligence is the one now incarnated in human form—at least I think it's human!—and it is the task of my life to remove this evil being from an unsuspecting world. That is my mission."

Neal gazed incredulously at the sci-

entist, and wondered if he talked that way to everyone he met.

And then the professor's fork clattered to the floor as he stared for the first time at Neal's left hand.

"That ring!" he boomed. "Where did you get that ring!"

His light eyes widened as though seeing ghostly things. Neal moved uneasily in his chair as he wondered again if the bearded giant were mentally unbalanced. Seeing his confusion, the professor reddened slightly and made an effort to compose himself.

"Sorry I shouted at you like that," he apologized. "You see, I used to have a ring exactly like it, and I never dreamed there might be a duplicate. I thought for a moment yours might be the same one—but that is impossible! At least it ought to be impossible, because last night I——"

"Yes, I know," said Neal as the professor paused uncertainly. "I was there and saw you."

"So it was you!" He squinted thoughtfully. "I was so preoccupied, I wasn't sure. . . . Did you see what happened before I threw it over the rail?"

Neal nodded. Professor Sanderson leaned forward as though he were about to explain, then closed his lips as he quite as obviously decided against it.

"Where did you get your ring?" he asked at length. "It's odd there should be two of them. Do you know anything of its history?"

Neal told him of Arfield's acquisition of it. The name, Arfield, rang familiarly in the professor's memory; and in answer to his resulting question, Neal described the disaster that had driven him from his profession of engineering. Then he mentioned that his father had worn the ring also. Of his violent death he said nothing; but the professor seemed to guess.

"And your father?" he inquired. "Did his possession of the diamond make no difference in his life?"

Neal stared. "What possible difference could the mere ownership of a ring make in a man's life?" he countered.

"It depends on the ring," Sanderson answered. "You say nothing happened to him that might be compared with Arfield's disaster?"

"He seemed changed, somehow, during his last years," Neal admitted at last. "And he died—was murdered, a month ago."

The scientist nodded as though he had expected some such reply. Again he subjected Neal to a thoughtful scrutiny.

"And you've never linked the wearing of the ring with the downfall of your father and your father's friend?" he probed.

"Once or twice some such thought had crossed my mind. But I have never allowed myself to take such a superstition seriously. . . ."

"It isn't entirely superstition!" declared Professor Sanderson, a grim line forming around his mouth. He drummed uncertainly with his heavy fingers. Then, "I'd like to tell you something of my own story," he said abruptly, "of the task for which I've been trained all my life, and something of the reason that prompted me to throw my ring into the sea last night. Will you come to my stateroom?"

"With pleasure," said Neal, rising uncertainly to the swaying floor. "I'll order coffee to be brought in——"

"For yourself, if you like," said the professor. "I never drink coffee. Its effect on the heart is slight—but in just that small a degree it might lessen my chances of saving an ignorant world from the horrible power that controls it."

2. *The Mind Machine*

THIRTY-SIX years before, Professor Sanderson said, during the great World War in 1916, a boy was born in the charity ward of a west coast city. The father, a heavyweight prize-

fighter, had died six months previously; and the mother, a variety dancer, left life with the birth of the child. The boy was sent to an orphan asylum where the first six years of his babyhood were spent.

To the institution one day there came a middle-aged scientist who wanted to adopt a son. The qualification he desired most was health; for the son he picked was to be trained long hours daily to be worthy of a certain mission he had in mind for him.

The matron led out the sturdy little son of the prize-fighter and the professor carried him off to his lonely laboratory in the mountains. And with the boy's eighth birthday there began the training of which Eden had given the matron a hint.

First, a carefully selected diet came into being. The best of food in sparse quantities, scientifically balanced, was set before him, together with vitamin concoctions of the professor's own formulæ, until he was eating at a training-table that would have roused the envy of an Olympic runner.

Next he entered a course of strenuous physical exercise. There were fast walks over the mountains — orderly twistings and turnings in the gymnasium over the laboratory that Eden had fitted up with apparatus from the city—swimming in the icy mountain creek where it widened into a pool behind the house. And during rest periods he lay in a glass-enclosed alcove built on the roof, his skin soaking in sun rays carefully filtered through panes tinted to the professor's specifications and which separated the light beams in some way, and for some reason, that no one else quite understood.

Last came mental training. Mathematics was the order of the day, budding into advanced algebra when the boy was still at an age normally devoted to soldiers and Indians. Physics came next; with Latin, as the tongue of science, and the practical ologies close behind. The more graceful chores of the modern curriculum were almost wholly ignored. Eden didn't think they would help in equipping him for his great life-work.

At the beginning there was a schedule of five hours of study and five hours of exercise every day. Gradually this was lengthened to six hours, to six and a half, and finally to eight hours. The two-mile runs were increased to four; and the swims in the chill creek behind the house lasted later and later into autumn, until at length they were extended through winter with the thermometer at zero or lower.

At fifteen he was nearly six feet tall, weighed a hundred and seventy-four pounds, and had a grasp of general science that was astounding. And at fifteen he rebelled at the monastic simplicity and labor of his life.

Often he had asked his mentor why he must keep such arduous training-hours, and always Eden had put him off with evasive answers, or had merely told him he wasn't old enough to understand. Now, with the body and brain of an average man of twenty-eight, though he was actually only fifteen years old, he insisted on an answer. He faced the scientist and demanded an explanation of why, out of each day of his life, a third should be devoted to exercise that would kill a lumberjack, a third to exhausted sleep, a third to dry scientific study with no end seeming to be in view for its application.

Outwardly composed, but inwardly trembling with the suspense of how it might be received, Eden finally gave him the explanation he demanded. He told him of the incarnate evil intelligence—the monstrous Thing—he was being trained to meet. He couched his words in curt scientific terms which, while making the import of his talk seem more astounding than ever in contrast with its cold phraseology, held young Sanderson's well-trained mind from instantly branding the

story as a concoction of a madman. And at the same moment, for the first time, he showed him the indigo diamond.

EDEN began with the theory upon which he had founded his scientific life years before: That the presence in human beings of large-scale good or evil is unnatural, abnormal, and due entirely to obedience to some powerful outside influence.

It is natural, he said, for humanity to commit good or evil actions in a small way; the small vices and virtues are inherent in human nature. But to remain natural they must remain small! Man is only an animal after all, unable by his own effort to escape the natural law of mediocrity and perform acts of great good or evil.

Yet occasionally men do grow beyond themselves and accomplish evil on a vast and hence unnatural scale. What was the answer? What factor entered here, tuned the brain to abnormal pitch, and drove these men from the path followed by their natural, mediocre brothers? Some external influence, some transmitted power of evil, must inflame every man who deviates from normality and leads his section of earth to ruin and death.

How it operated, and of what it might consist, were the problems to which Eden applied himself.

Since man's actions originate in his brain, the course of his experiment necessarily led through the mind. First, then, he must have a machine to measure grade and degree of mental activity.

He set to work, and out of his necessity he invented the instrument he needed. It was simple enough in principle—a detector on the order of a seismograph, to record disturbances of distant minds just as that machine recorded disturbances of distant earth surfaces. It was a fragile, sensitive thing of platinum wire like cobwebs, coiled springs that must be grasped delicately with tweezers and held to the light in order to be visible, and fine mesh screening like bits of gossamer. Faintly electrified it caught and measured the quantity and quality of thought. He called it the edograph.

The edograph did its work too well at first! It reacted to every strong, clearly defined thought-stream in range; and as its range was the face of the earth, the indicator needle did little but dart from calibration to calibration too rapidly for the eye to follow. Eden was aghast at the unforeseen development, which yet should have been so apparent to an experimenter. But a solution soon offered itself.

An infamous murderer — one of those inhuman beings who seem wholly evil—had been caught, and lay in the death cell of the state prison. So to the prison went Eden with his thought recorder; and he obtained permission to spend a night in the adjoining cell.

Knowing the sinister quality of the murderer's thought, and with that thought dominating all else because it was so near, it was finally possible for him to get the wave length and set the machine to record only evil mental disturbances. Then he retarded the sensitivity of the instrument so that only the purest and strongest of destructive vibrations were recorded on the finely calibrated dial.

NOW he began the advanced stage of his work.

His first observation was that the needle pointed steadily to a figure a third of the way around the dial, indicating a constant flow of evil power from some unguessable point in the compass. It was like a gigantic black river, that steady flow. It proved that there really was some malignant power—some living, devilish Thing—that squatted afar in a hidden place and ruled humanity through its baser part.

The problem was now to ascertain what it might be—if, indeed, it were not entirely abstract—and try to locate it.

He accepted the constant recording of evil as his working normal, set the dial so the zero point coincided with the unmoving detector needle, and began to spend all his waking hours before his edograph with a chart ruled off to record every variation of the sensitive machine.

Now and again the needle crawled up a few points, remained for a little while, and dropped back again, its movements forming a power peak on the spaced chart.

With every power peak, Eden searched the leading journals of the world for news of some tremendous hurt to humanity, and tried to trace the author of it—a discovery easily made in most cases, since few of these cataclysms came under the heading of crime and the authors were under no necessity of concealing their identities. The information thus gained was faithfully tabulated, with particular care taken to mention distance and compass direction.

For example, the needle would rise to 12:02; and next day's paper would disclose that a well-known stock manipulator had made over a hundred million dollars by playing with the price of some essential and life-giving cereal. At the time he planned the coup he was in Florida, giving his orders from there by telephone. Promptly Eden would ascertain the latitude and longitude of the Floridian town, its distance from the laboratory, and its compass direction; and set the figures down against the 12.02 registration.

Again, the needle would point to 11.39; and a small item would appear in the newspapers revealing the fact that the mayor of a certain city had reported its tenements—notorious firetraps—to be reasonably fire-proof and sanitary. There followed distance and location, which was filed with the dial reading.

Occasionally it was some time before the meaning of a power deviation was explained. Thus there was the instance when the edograph registered 8.21, and it was fourteen months before the tabulation could be completed: A too economically constructed theater roof caved with the weight of an unusually heavy snowfall during a crowded attendance, and the contractor was to be tried for criminal negligence. He had O. K.'d the building plans just fourteen months before!

From these tabulations Eden worked at the task of locating the malevolent central power of evil, figuring that by reducing to a formula the geographic locations, distances, and corresponding degrees of disturbance registered, he could get a wave-length-distance ratio that would give him the information he sought.

The result was a failure because one of his factors was inconstant: The degree of individual force varied so that a man five hundred miles away might register no more strongly than a man two thousand miles away, provided the latter's villainy was the more gigantic.

This was proved without further doubt by the instance where the needle reached the astounding height of 39.40, to be followed shortly by news of the invasion of Belgium. Here was a mental explosion thousands of miles away that showed stronger than any other case on file, near or far! A new method must be tried.

It was shortly after this that an incident occurred in his life which was to have an important bearing on his work — and which revealed the fact that his persistent labors were not entirely unknown to the dim enemy he was beginning to threaten with exposure.

A man knocked at his door one

night, said he had lost his way, and asked if he could be sheltered until morning. There was no other house for miles around and it was so late in autumn that a night out of doors was unthinkable. Without question, Eden invited him to be his guest.

He proved to be an educated man, an interesting talker, and a pleasant fellow. Eden thoroughly enjoyed his unexpected company. He conversed more freely with him than he had talked to anyone else in years. In him he found an audience gifted with the power of flattering attention; and he discovered himself describing his life alone in the mountains, such incidents of his laboratory existence as he thought might be interesting to a layman — and even something of the nature of his greatest experiment.

Here, however, he quickly drew back into his accustomed shell of reticence. For all he knew the fellow might be a journalist; and he would be more than a fool if he continued frankly to expose the details of his life's supreme work to the possible jeers of the public.

He was astounded at the effort of will it cost to refrain from babbling to this utter stranger!

In the morning his guest left directly after breakfast, thanking him for his courtesy. And it wasn't till afternoon that Eden stumbled onto the personal possession he had left behind. Whether it was an oversight or a clumsy attempt at tactful payment, he couldn't decide. . . .

It was a ring—a darkly transparent, flat-cut blue stone held in a heavy gold mounting formed of two coiled serpents. At a glance he saw that it was very old, and probably valuable. Either his guest was a quixotic multimillionaire to scatter such favors in his wake, or he was a singularly forgetful man. On the chance that the latter was the correct supposition, he wrote to the city's leading daily and had an announcement inserted in the personal column; but he never heard from his guest again, nor ran across the name he had given—Charles Derrez.

It was immediately afterward that his invaluable edograph refused to function.

The indicator needle ceased to register accurately the evil thoughts of distant minds, and seemed to have acquired a devilish genius of its own. The slender hand darted and quivered, raced around the dial only to fall back to zero and remain inert, swung like an insane pendulum. In alarm he retarded the sensitivity of the machine lest it destroy itself by its own violence, and tried to find the trouble and adjust it.

The task proved impossible. Though diminished in activity it continued its senseless quivering and chaotic swinging, its starts and stops and meaningless spasms. The cause was evidently external, and he must solve its mystery or give up his experiment and call the years wasted.

Was it some actual recording of new plans of dictators in the war then being waged? No. That would not account for the wild convulsions of the instrument: A steady flow would have been registered. Was it some concentrated, deliberate design against his experiment? Probably. By elimination he worked it out.

The only stranger to enter his laboratory for years was the man, Derrez. In some manner he must have radiated an influence powerful enough nearly to wreck the edograph. The influence persisted in his absence. Was it a ghost of his will lingering behind him, a psychic echo of an uncommonly evil soul remaining within the four walls of the laboratory? It was possible, but not scientifically probable. Some force more direct and tangible than a psychic echo was producing the crazy gyrations of the edograph needle!

Well—the man actually had left behind something more tangible than

reflected personality. He had left his ring. And it began to seem probable now that it had been left neither through oversight nor quixotism.

Keenly watching the convulsive movement of the needle, Eden slipped the ring on his finger and approached the instrument to test the possible effect of proximity. . . .

Instantly with the feel of the ring a temporary insanity clutched him! It was a physical insanity, leaving his mind untouched, as though another person had been poured into his skin and were waving his arms and moving his legs regardless of the commands of his brain. And the brain withdrew, appalled, and watched the astounding rebellion of the body. .

He grasped a heavy stick and smashed a row of test-tubes to bits. He lifted a storage battery as though it were a biscuit tin, and crashed it through a window. For thirty seconds he raged around the laboratory, breaking everything within reach.

And then, with club upraised, he approached the edograph—that fragile, intricate mass of cobweb wires and mesh!

But here the amazed brain, by a titanic effort, resumed control. With the fingers of his left hand he pried frantically at the fingers of his right until the club fell from his grasp. He managed finally to remove the ring and place it a safe distance away on a splintered rack, after which he sank exhausted into a chair.

The experiment, though unexpectedly violent, had been a success. He knew now why—though he did not know how—his invention had been rendered useless.

The edograph never again performed its designed function. He tried in every conceivable and extravagant way to insulate the ring, to cut off the powerful emanations from the blue diamond that hopelessly unbalanced the instrument; but every attempt ended only in further dismaying proof of the remarkable penetrating quality of the rays with which he had been experimenting since his work began. When he finally sealed the ring in a lead-lined quartz case to absolutely no avail, he gave it up.

There remained but one other insulation to try—that of sheer distance. He was about to send the diamond by registered mail to a European bank vault when he made a curious discovery regarding the seemingly useless edograph.

Like many another intricate invention, it so happened that the edograph had assembled in its platinum and spring steel heart a quality of which the inventor himself had been ignorant. This was the property not only of recording strength of thought rays, but also of transmitting pictures relevant to the source of these rays if a blank surface of the right kind were at hand to receive them. A kind of television. This unconsidered property of the instrument was imperfect, crude; but it was well enough defined to lead to great consequences. Eden discovered it only by a fortunate accident.

In a last effort to neutralize the machine to the dominating influence of the ring, he sat one night at the big stone block on which the edograph rested, working absorbedly at attempted adjustment. The dial was off; and a light bulb, lowered almost to the level of his eyes, poured its glow over the twining array of mesh and springs. The ring was placed in front of the instrument and a little to one side, so that the flat surface of the diamond faced it squarely.

Wrapped in his task, he was increasing and decreasing the infinitesimal amount of electric current that pulsed through the delicate machine. And as he turned the current a little higher than he had ever dared risk before, he happened to gaze at the jewel. . . .

In its oblong surface, as in a tiny,

mirror, there was a faint reflection of something.

At first all he could see was a slightly moving blur, shot through with reflected gleams from the light bulb near his head. Then it assumed vague outlines, so vague indeed that he thought his imagination was responsible for them or that he was again under the hypnotic spell of the indigo-blue stone. But the reflected object, if indistinct, was also unvarying; and he was at length convinced that he saw it with the eyes of the flesh and not of the mind.

He glanced up quickly to see if someone had entered the laboratory unnoticed by him in his absorption, and was standing behind him. But the image was not the reflection of anyone in that room! It came from afar—and could have only one significance!

In his lonely mountain laboratory, transmitted from God knew where, was being mirrored the image of the monster who was the mainspring of earthly wickedness—the devilish Being who was the soul of evil!

Catching his breath, Eden leaned forward to examine it more closely. Inadverently he touched the graduated switch with his hand. . . .

With the change in current through the edograph, the picture blurred and faded.

Again and again he fumbled with the switch, trying, trying for the precise amount of current that had endowed the instrument with its marvelous, unsuspected power. His effort lasted until eight in the morning, when, red-eyed and wringing with perspiration, he was forcibly barred from further experiment: reckless in his disappointment and dismay, he turned the current on a shade too strongly and burned out one of the myriad wires.

He was frantic at the delay entailed. Calling up a manufacturing jeweler in the city, he ordered a replacement to be made and rushed by special messenger. But with every resource strained to save time, it was six days before the part was drawn to proper micrometer fit and tempered as to specification.

Meanwhile he paced his laboratory, slept when he fell exhausted into a chair, and ate when the floor swayed dizzily up to meet him. Now he was certain he had seen something in the blue diamond—the transmitted image of the Thing of Evil he sought! Now he fancied despondently that it was all imaginary. At one moment he was a great man on the brink of a colossal discovery; at the next he was a futile dreamer.

By the time the replacement came he was calm with the lethargy of exhaustion. With numb fingers he put the hair-like wire in place. The light bulb was lowered to its former level—he did not know if this was necessary, but he was careful to duplicate every condition of the former partial success. He set the ring so that it faced the dialless edograph, and began to manipulate the power switch.

A thousandth at a time he turned it, staring unblinking at the flat-cut diamond that had once, somehow, acted as a screen for the reception of a distant picture. Six and a half hours later he scored again! On the polished surface appeared a faint blur that cleared a trifle with the next thousandth, and refused to grow more distinct with further manipulation.

This time Eden was prepared. He took a picture of the vague image on a sensitized plate. Then he noted down the dial number of the switch, turned it off, and stumbled into bed to sleep like a dead man for twenty-two hours.

3. *The Black Monarch*

The photograph developed from that plate—the actual photograph of the world's dread master, the Monarch of all Evil—gave him the supreme thrill of his life.

As a picture it was lamentable—a jagged pattern of white patches

and gray shadows grouped around a central blur that vaguely resembled a human figure. But under a lens the jagged pattern became more significant as it was enlarged.

The white patches were light-shot areas from the glare of the bulb in the polished surface of the diamond. The shadows remained meaningless shadows. But the central blur, that looked like a human figure, resolved itself unmistakably into a dim portrayal of the devilish being he hunted, whose existence he alone suspected.

It *was* a human figure, that tantalizing blur! At least it was human in form. Gigantic, dim, like a distorted glimpse of a swimmer under water, it lurked among the imperfections of the film.

At first Eden, examining it breathlessly through the lens, thought it was a grotesque female, as there seemed to be a kind of skirt ending midway between waist and knee. But the span of the creature's shoulders persuaded him at last that it was a man—at least in semblance—but dressed as no men garb themselves in any known part of the world.

The head remained indecipherable. Centered between the great shoulders there was something indeed. But it must be merely one of the shadows sharpened to a clearer shape. It was impossible that it should be the Thing's head—it was three times too large for that, and was shaped rather like a big-bore, long-range projectile. Eden eventually decided it was but another photographic imperfection.

Picture after picture was taken. Each was murky and faint, but some one detail in each stood out clearer than in any of the others. By gradually piecing these definable details together, Eden saw his antagonist—his scientifically evoked devil—as through a haze of smoke. And he trembled a little at what he saw!

The most arresting feature was the head. The first dim impression had been correct and not a photographic flaw.

Springing straight up from the Thing's shoulders was a smooth cylindrical mass tapering to a rounded point. In the front were two round patches that resembled huge, unwinking eyes. Aside from these there was no trace of other human features — no nose, nor mouth, nor ears. A perfectly plain, tapered cylinder with round spots that might or might not function as organs of sight!

About the body there was less to excite bewilderment. It was clad in a one-piece tunic that extended halfway to the knee in a kilt effect and fastened around the waist with a wide belt. The bare arms and legs were enormously muscled; and the many positions in which the camera caught the figure indicated vigorous activity. The creature loomed gigantic! Although there was no standard of comparison by which to judge whether it might be two feet high or ten, one judged it to be about a foot above average stature.

Strangest of all, however, even stranger than the fantastic head, was an impression that had nothing to do with the mechanical recording of the camera. This was a feeling of horror and repulsion that closed over one like a thick sea at the mere sight of that dimly pictured, awful form!

It was at this point that Professor Eden decided he must have help. Until the present moment he had never imagined what might be the appearance of the foe against which he had pitted himself. A disembodied brain, perhaps, or—in which case he would have had to admit complete defeat—an abstract force against which no mortal could struggle.

By proving to be a human creature, though of an entirely new kind, it justified his hopes but neces-

sitated aid. Here was a thing of mind and body, too; and while he dared to cross minds with it, he knew himself defeated physically before he started.

The thought of using man-made engines of force—firearms, explosives—against this superlative monster was too ridiculous to entertain for a moment. He must get an apostle who combined great brain and huge muscle even as that perverted, unnatural Thing combined great brain and huge muscle. The only method of acquiring such a disciple was to choose him in embryo and train him to the point where he could go forth on his bizarre crusade with some chance of success.

That apostle, still as the oak chair in which he sat, was now listening to his demanded explanation of the reason for his daily herculean training.

YOUNG Sanderson breathed deeply and flexed the muscles of his legs to relieve them of the nervous cramp that attends long and intense mental concentration.

"What makes you think this—this Thing will permit the approach of an opponent?" he asked.

It was Eden's turn to draw a deep breath. The question was a perfectly serious one, with no underlying hint of incredulity. At least he was believed.

"Shut up in his underground palace like a blind animal," he replied, "he can not be omnipotent. Undoubtedly he has some method of informing himself of the thoughts and activities of any given man at any given time—probably through some sort of transmitted picture process having to do with the blue diamond his messenger delivered to me. But it is impossible that he should be all-seeing! A man might slip into his hiding-place while his attention was engaged elsewhere." He sighed. "It is rather tenuous reasoning, my son," he confessed humbly.

"Hmm," said Sanderson. "How do you know he lives underground? And you mention a palace. Do any of these details show in the pictures you speak of?"

"No. I am merely theorizing. So unique a creature must live apart from all other men or he would be too conspicuous a figure to remain unknown. As there is no habitable place on the face of the earth where he could get this necessary solitude, his only refuge would be under the ground. Also, with his tremendous capabilities, he would contrive himself the most luxurious dwelling he could to make up for his enforced exile."

"Tenuous reasoning indeed!" commented Sanderson, speaking as the scientist and not as the son.

"No more so than the first theory that started all this experimenting—and that completely proved itself!" defended Eden. No master of his craft is too consistently humble before his apprentice.

"Then you think much of the evil of the world would wither at the extinction of this underground monarch?"

"I don't know. There must be a larger, abstract power of evil in existence, of which this creature is but a small incarnate part. The larger force is, of course, unreachable. But the world would probably be enormously benefited by the removal of this personified influence."

"Mightn't he—if he's mortal as you say—eventually die a natural death of old age and automatically rid the world of his rule?"

"It's doubtful," said Eden. "Either this rule is a constantly descending one of identical father to identical son, or, what is more likely, he has solved the problem of indefinitely prolonging life."

"Have you located his hiding-place yet?"

"No, that is the final task left to perform before—venturing against him?" It was a question rather than a statement, an appeal, an advance exoneration if the apostle should not see eye to eye with the master.

"Let me look at the pictures of the Thing I'm training to meet," was Sanderson's calm answer, "and then we'll see if we can mark the spot where he hides his misshapen head."

Years passed while they worked at this final computation. The labor was endlessly intricate: Attempts to measure the thought waves tabulated by the edograph before the unsettling proximity of the ring had destroyed its function; attempts to measure the rays responsible for the transmission of the pictures; comparisons of the two results; further experiments, only a few of which were remotely rewarded with success.

And in the course of examining and re-examining the photographs they took of the image in the jewel, they unearthed another puzzle.

Faintly in some of the pictures could be discerned a circular, luminous patch whose outline was unvarying. It looked like a ghost of a moon—such a moon as might be seen through thin cloud on a bright morning. Sometimes a photograph would show just an edge of it; sometimes it would be half hidden in back of the shadowy, human-looking figure. In the picture which revealed the phenomenon most clearly and which had first drawn their attention to it, the luminous patch chanced to be centered squarely behind the conical head like an ominous halo. What it might be, they could not guess. . . .

Meanwhile their work dragged on. Eden was a burned-out shell of a man before their task was completed and they could lay positive finger to map and say, "He is here!"

He died; and Sanderson went out to the encounter for which he had been trained during the whole of his life.

MECHANICALLY Neal Emory reached out his hand for the long-cooled, neglected cup of coffee. The laboratory, wherein two men wrestled with an intangible evil force and strove mightily to trap a shadow, faded with the end of Sanderson's words; and he was back again in a matter-of-fact stateroom surrounded by matter-of-fact things. Also he was again in his normal frame of mind, and, in the ensuing silence, able to review what he had heard and think about it.

The professor's story was the most reasonable presentation of unreason he had ever heard; a perfectly logical sequence of events leading to an illogical result; a crazily ordered mathematical progression that ended in a child's fable. It reminded him of the trick where it is proved, with paper and pencil, that four and seven add up to ten.

And yet, under his mental scoffing at the impossibility of the tale, one small remembrance of something raised its voice and refused to be stilled—though he denied it recognition.

"Have you got those pictures with you?" he inquired, after a time.

"No. Before I left, I put them in the hands of my bank with a complete account of the experiment to date. If I should disappear the bank is to give them to the newspapers. Alive, I should be called insane if I published the facts and made a bid for help. But dead, I might have a chance of being believed, and a successor might be found to carry on my work."

"Why did you decide to tell me about it?"

At the sound of his voice the professor turned quickly to face him.

"Don't you believe what I've told you?" he asked.

"Of course I do!" said Neal; and he meant it sincerely. No one could have listened to the earnest words, or watched Sanderson's face in their telling, without believing him.

"But you think I—well, that I've worked too long at this and have allowed it to unsettle my mind?"

"Certainly not," murmured Neal.

"Your tone contradicts your words," said the professor with a shrug. "And yet you have proof enough, I think. You saw me come within a fraction of suicide last night. It was the Black Monarch, working through the infernal diamond I got from Eden, who caused that. My body became possessed of his mind, and for the moment my body was determined to destroy itself! He knows I'm moving against him and means to stop me if he can."

Neal lit a cigarette. "Was that why you threw the ring away?"

"Yes. A blind desire to rid myself of the object that threatened my life. Animal instinct of self-preservation. I'd give a lot to undo the act—I was depending on the ring to help in my search. Being a direct tool of the devilish creature I'm hunting, it might have proved a connecting link, a thread to lead me into his presence."

Neal gazed at the indigo-blue diamond on his own finger, the ring that was an exact duplicate of the one involved in the amazing laboratory experiments.

"You think this stone may be under the same influence?" he asked, the small remembrance under his maze of doubt demanding to be heard.

"Certainly. It led your father to his death, didn't it?"

"What!"

"Didn't it?" insisted the professor.

Neal stared at him, his jaw set at a hard angle. For an instant he allowed himself to suppose the professor's calculations were right, in which event there existed somewhere a tangible Thing from which he might wring revenge for his father's death! The thought was welcome. Then reason returned.

"It was only coincidence that my father's mind should happen to slide shortly after he began to wear the ring," he declared.

"And it was only coincidence, I suppose, that I should nearly commit suicide last night because of the ring on my own hand! It was only coincidence that Professor Eden, when he slipped the ring on his finger, should immediately go mad and wreck a lot of his valuable laboratory equipment — and come within an ace of smashing his edograph, the heart of his experiment! Your jewel is of a piece with the one I threw into the sea, my friend, and that was designed in some unguessable way to bring the wearer under the influence of my evil antagonist. So I tell you it was responsible for Arfield's disaster, for the ruin your unsuspecting father made of his great responsibilities—and for his death."

"But, look here! I've worn this ring for over a month, and I haven't felt any insane impulses."

"You're quite sure of that?"

The insistent memory that kept him from unhesitatingly branding the professor's story as impossible, demanded utterance. He told of his dream of the evening before, when he had waked to find himself trying to force his way through the porthole and into the sea. "But it was only a nightmare," he concluded. "The ring could have had nothing to do with it."

"Didn't you say your left hand was extended first — your ring hand?"

"A small thing," objected Neal, choosing to ignore the fact that he

had puzzled over the same observation.

"Not a small thing at all! A few minutes ago you reached automatically for your coffee cup, using your right hand. The cigarette you are now smoking was lit from a lighter held in your right hand. And you put the cigarette case back in your pocket with your right hand in spite of the fact that you could have saved several unnecessary motions by using your left. Every unconscious move you make proves you extremely right-handed. Yet in your sleep, when the unconscious is the supreme governing power, your left hand suddenly takes the initiative—and you say it has no significance!"

Not being able to find a ready answer, Neal was silent for a few moments. Then, "It all takes me back to Sunday School days," he mused. "There was a wicked old devil living under the ground and inspiring everyone to evil for his own ends. . . ."

"The idea is not so far from the mark!" said the professor in all seriousness. "This being, this evil genius, might very easily be—indeed, has been—named Devil, in just the sense you mean. But he is mortal enough to be destroyed, differing in this from the biblical devil—and I'm the one who is going to destroy him!"

As Neal looked at him the smile faded from his lips. Nobody could have continued to grin after regarding the transfigured face of this man who had sworn his life away to the pursuit of a dream.

The professor relaxed from his pose—though such was his sincerity that he didn't conceive for a moment that it might be considered a pose—and stepped across the room to his trunk. From it he took a large-scale map of Algeria, North Africa, which he spread open on his knees.

He pointed to a tiny penciled cross near Bone, not far from the Mediterranean coast. Looking closely, Neal saw that the cross almost directly superimposed a speck tagged Hammam Meskoutine.

"Our devil has his headquarters here," rumbled the professor.

Neal thought he detected a faint pleading note in the heavy voice; and a premonition of why he was being confided in so openly made him glance up hastily.

"Why are you telling me all this?" he demanded again.

The professor looked as though he wanted badly to say something and didn't quite know how to phrase it.

"It's because I want you to help me," he blurted after a moment. "I want to ask you to go along with me. . . ."

"To go along with you! Why?"

"I could give a lot of answers to that. I could say that, having lost my own diamond, yours might substitute as possible pathfinder. I could say that I need someone to act as messenger and get back to the world with a record of events in case something happens to me—and I have felt more than once that I might not come out of this alive. I could give a dozen reasons but I'll only bother with the main one: I want help in this lonely business, and I like you immensely. Will you be my partner in an attempt to free the world from this menace? Our efforts are bound to pass unknown and unrewarded, but——"

"Well, I'm damned!" was all Neal could find to say.

"Think it over," urged Sanderson. "It's dangerous business, and I suppose I haven't the moral right to ask anyone to share it. But, if you could see your way clear——"

Back in his stateroom, Neal thought of a dozen replies he should have made to the professor—replies he had been too much surprized to formulate on the spur of the mo-

ment. Very little deliberating was necessary to tell what answer he would give to the proposition! He got into bed, determined to fall asleep and forget the whole affair. But sleep was long in coming. The pathos of the huge professor's life haunted him. Here was a man with an able mind and a marvelous physique, devoting his existence to a kink in his brain that sent him hunting phantoms! A modern knight going on a Twentieth Century quest —against a suggestively formed blur on a sensitized plate!

However, he caught himself up at this point. Who was he to say the professor was insane in his crusade? There were many intangible forces able to produce distant phenomena. Electric energy could be projected through space to far places and act powerfully there on appropriate objects. Waves of unseen impulse carried light, pictures, sound, at the command of science. Why, then, was it impossible for a superpowerful being to find a way of transmitting his own thought to the brains of others and forcing them to perform his will?

Here his teeth clicked shut and he drew an uneven breath. Again he realized that, if Sanderson were right, it was not coincidence that his father had gone to ruin and death shortly after receiving the ring. The evil genius, through the antenna of the blue diamond, had sent him there! Here was reason enough to join the professor!

He relaxed with a smile at his credulity. Resolved to tell Sanderson he could not go, he composed himself for sleep. First thing in the morning he would give his excuses. . . .

He never gave them. In the morning he went to breakfast paler than usual and grim-eyed. The professor wasn't there, so he went to his stateroom, opening the door to find him swinging his mighty arms in a vigorous set of exercises.

"I'm going with you!" he said abruptly.

Sanderson stopped his labors, and enveloped Neal's hand in a grip that he felt for days afterward.

"But what decided you?" he inquired. "Last night you were determined not to go. I could see it in your face."

"I had another dream last night," said Neal, "and I woke up half out the port-hole. Again I went through left hand first!" He gazed with narrowed eyes at his sullen-looking blue diamond.

4. *The Crusade*

THE country surrounding the speck on the map tagged Hammam Meskoutine is extraordinary and grotesque.

Low mountains of splintered gray rock enclose a valley that seems to lie under their misshapen shadows as under a weight. In the valley are mineral springs, frothing up in a score of spots, which have built themselves fifty-foot-high pulpits of the snow-white minerals which load the waters.

The springs, besides being laden with minerals, are intensely hot—a bare three or four degrees below the boiling-point. Thus from dozens of places spirals of steam curl up into the air and lend a further air of unreality to the land.

The healing waters of the locality have been known as far back as history records; and to this day there can be seen a group of Roman baths in excellent preservation. Modernity has not been left behind. Near the largest spring, a complacent incongruity in the bizarre landscape, there is a large and sophisticated-appearing hotel, which is all there is to Hammam Meskoutine. And here Neal and Sanderson stayed while

they sought an opening into the secret retreat of the Black Monarch.

With a large-scale local map presented them by the concierge, they planned an efficient combing of the surrounding land.

According to the figuring of Eden and Sanderson, the evil genius had his underground palace within a three-mile radius of Hammam Meskoutine. But to allow for possible errors in calculation they drew a circle with a five instead of a three mile radius, using the hotel site as center. They ruled the circle into thirty-six squares, each square to take a full day's work of searching for any kind of cave or crevice that looked as though it might lead down for a considerable distance.

At seven in the morning of the first day they started on their hunt for the hiding-place of old Eden's Devil, having chosen the center square on the map.

Back and forth they laced over the allotted segment, following a pocket compass to avoid covering any patch twice at the expense of an unexplored patch. The areas about the spring sources were scrutinized with particular care. Sanderson poked around the roots of thick bushes with his steel-tipped cane; each fissure in the soft rock was sounded with a weighted cord regardless of narrowness; even flat stones were overturned if there was any indication that they might be hiding intriguing holes. By five-thirty the square had been thoroughly covered, and the result was a blank.

"But of course it will be hard to find," said Neal. "If the opening to the home of our Devil weren't small and well concealed it would have been uncovered long ago. Why—perhaps there's no opening at all! He might be sealed up like a snake in a strong box!"

"In that event the snake would die," the professor pointed out. "There must be ventilation shafts, either natural or artificial, leading down. We can only hope to find one of them. . . ."

"Then what—mine for him? Such a hole would certainly be too small to admit a human body."

"We'll have to let that problem take care of itself when it comes up," said the professor with a worried frown.

For five weeks they searched the five mile area ruled out on the map; and at the end of that time they had to admit failure.

Not a cave in the entire district but what had been examined with scrupulous thoroughness. Not a fissure or crevice but what had been sounded from end to end. And only once was there a momentary flare of hope: a crack in the rock at the foot of a square hill named Block Mountain had seemed to be bottomless. But when another twenty feet was added to the weighted cord they touched bottom quickly enough.

"Are you sure your original figuring was right?" Neal asked as they returned from that fiasco. "I've never been able to understand how you and Eden could sit in your laboratory, thousands of miles from here, and calculate that this particular spot concealed your Devil! Are you absolutely sure you were right?"

"I still think we were right, but—I'm not so sure as I once was," murmured Sanderson; and at the look on his face, Neal forbore to question him further.

Next day Sanderson advanced a new theory, one that seemed to have fired him again with certainty and eagerness — enthusiasms that had dropped slowly from him during their weeks of fruitless labor.

"I think," he said, "that we ought to try an experiment with your blue diamond. We have been overlooking that. It has proved to be a connecting link between ourselves and

the Power we seek—maybe in some way it can guide us. Close your eyes."

"What?"

"Close your eyes. Then hold out your left hand and turn around several times until you've lost your sense of direction. When you haven't an idea which way you're facing, stop, and we'll see where your ring hand is pointing."

"It's like a child's game!" expostulated Neal as, feeling more than a little foolish, he obeyed the order.

"Is it? I never played games when I was a child. Do you know which way you're facing?"

"No."

"Stop any time, then. Ah. . . ."

With a tingle of excitement, Neal opened his eyes to see where he was pointing. . . .

Straight ahead of them was Block Mountain! Gray and leaden-colored, looking as though squared by human hands to receive some incredibly vast statue, it seemed a likely monument to squat at the entrance to a scientific land of hobgoblins.

Eagerly they started toward it. And as they neared it they suddenly felt the earth tremble slightly under their feet, and heard a low rumbling noise as though an avalanche had started into being. Rounding the steep side of the cliff they found the cause of the noise—a rock slide that had bared a great hole into which they could look and discern a sullen glint of water.

The disturbance that had revealed the hitherto undreamed-of subterranean lake was not so much a slide as a collapse. A shell of rock a few yards across and only twenty or twenty-five feet thick at this point, had fallen of its own weight into the water below, where a tip of it remained as a diminutive islet above the surface. They climbed down to this and gazed about them.

In the direction of the mountain the lake apparently ended in a wall of stone a few yards from the cave-in. Toward the hotel, two miles away, it extended for an unguessable distance. A barely perceptible current proved that there were outlets and inlets; but there was no way of telling where these might be. The roof of rock was very low, coming down almost to the surface in places, and in others dipping entirely below the lake level like great, twisted columns. Thus one got an impression of a labyrinthine maze with arches and tunnels opening in every direction save the rear.

There was no way of ascertaining how large the body of water was, but one received a conception, a *feel*, of immensity. Outside the short range of their flashlights the columned lake seemed to stretch on and on for awesome distances. So much the professor and Neal were able to discover.

Then, as there was nothing more they could do without a boat with which to explore the lake further, they returned to the hotel—to order a small shell from Bone, and get a good rest against the perilous search they proposed to undertake next day.

As soon as the boat was delivered next morning, they set off toward Block Mountain, following the Arab porters who were carrying the fragile shell.

Solemnly they superintended the lowering of the craft to the surface of the subterranean lake. Then they climbed down, took one look through the jagged opening above them as though to carry away a picture of sky and trees and clouds, and assumed their places. Neal shoved away from the rock and Sanderson grasped the oars. Before he started to row, however, he faced Neal somberly.

"This is the pathway to the stronghold of the Power of Evil," he

said. "I'm certain of it. You know the danger we run if I am right?"

"I do," said Neal.

"From this point on, I haven't an idea what may happen to us. But—you know the chances are all against our returning to the surface of the earth again?"

"Yes."

"You're sure you want to go on and face this monster?"

"I am," said Neal.

"Then," said the professor, drawing a deep breath, "we will start!"

With slow strokes he sent the boat along the right bank. They would skirt the edge of the water, he explained, as closely as the low-hanging roof permitted; and they would stop to examine any openings that looked worthy of exploration. But they saw no openings. Ever on their right the lake was bounded unbrokenly by the down-drooping rock; and on their left, toward the center, was the maze of columns rearing up from the surface.

They had drifted for half an hour before the professor noticed that it was perceptibly easier to maintain their speed.

"The current is getting stronger," he remarked. "If the pace gets too swift we'll turn back the way we came and edge down the other side."

Neal nodded. "Along the edge is best. We'd lose ourselves hopelessly in that muddle of pillars in the center."

For a time after that they were silent, depressed by their surroundings. Some mammoth grottoes are inspiring in their beauty, glittering as though sown with jewels, studded with lacy, half-columns and fairy fretwork. But this was different. Drab, gray-brown, the low-arched roof extended above them in sharp ridges and waves like an inverted, crystallized sea. There was no glitter, no grace—only gloomy shadows melting into further shadows as the beams of their flashlight lost themselves in the distance.

The current grew rapidly stronger. Soon the professor was only moving his oars to keep steerage way, and a faint murmuring could be heard far ahead, a murmuring that grew slowly into a sound like that of a distant train passing over a high trestle.

"A waterfall!" exclaimed Neal.

"Yes," acknowledged the professor. "But I can still manage the oars quite easily. We'll keep on for awhile, as long as we dare. I wonder how deep it is. Can you see bottom?"

Neal trained the light over the side of the boat—and started so violently that he nearly dropped it.

"Good God!" he exclaimed, staring down at something just under the surface, something that drifted with the current and kept an even pace with the boat.

"What is it?" asked the professor, startled at the expression on his face. "What do you see?"

"The most impossible creation this side of a nightmare! Look!"

Sanderson dropped the oars and leaned over the side. Together they stared, fascinated, at the thing that drifted below them.

It was a long, serpentine creature that looked like an eel, but was larger than any eel could possibly be. The body was sulfur-yellow. The front was entirely mouth, like the cone of a funnel, studded with sharp, backward-pointing teeth. The tail tapered into a ten-foot length of living whip-lash that coiled hungrily and blindly about as though searching for prey. Down the whole length of the back and sides were rows of blood-red, twining tentacles that resembled attenuated, skinless fingers. There were no eyes discernible.

"If that snaky-looking monster ever takes a notion to climb into the boat——" breathed Neal. "What on earth can it be?"

"I don't know. There's another one!"

Into the circle of light writhed a second sulfur-colored body, not quite so large as the first. Side by side the two repellent things drifted with the current, seemingly unaware of each other.

"Friends or enemies?" whispered Neal.

The next instant the question was answered as the long, groping tails touched for a fraction of a second. Sightless as they were, up until that moment each must have been oblivious of the other's proximity; but with the momentary contact it was as though a switch had been thrown charging them with electric current. With the quickness of light the two monsters were coiled around each other, tails snapping from side to side almost too rapidly for the eye to follow.

Length to length they twined and tightened with convulsive jerks, like two insane water pythons trying to squeeze the life from each other. Back along the twisted mass of their yellow bodies reached the slender, powerful tails, flicking about the funnel-shaped heads like the hands of wrestlers feeling for the hold that shall decide the struggle.

Once a glimpse was got of what this hold might be. The smaller of the two suddenly wound its tail around the wide-open jaws of the larger and pressed until the flesh stood out in ridges on each side of the constricted coil.

Their movements increased in intensity until the boat swayed with the commotion of the surrounding water. Out of the circle of light shot the writhing things, then back in—and the larger fish had shaken free of the deadly tail clamped around its jaws. The smaller appeared to be weakening.

Up and down the shimmering bodies the blood-red tentacles interlaced and tore at each other, leaving disks of flesh that oozed liquid. And now the larger reptile caught the other's jaw with flashing tail — was shaken off—caught the hold again. . . .

Tighter and tighter the steely length circled the gaping mouth. The smaller creature coiled and writhed and shook its length like a snapping rope, but the pressure could not be dislodged. Slowly its jaws crumpled like the mouth of a bag around which a cord is tied too tightly.

In an instant the fight was ended. The larger mouth engulfed the smaller, crushed one. The two lengths momentarily became one long form as they were telescoped together. Back through the slanting jaws the beaten monster was forced inch by inch, snapping from side to side but ever held by the inward-pointing teeth.

Steadily it disappeared until only the whip-lash tail could be seen, still feebly coiling and twisting. Then the victor darted out of the circle of light, back against the current. It moved with frantic haste, as though suddenly startled by something.

"Good heavens!" exclaimed Neal, drawing an uneven breath. "What an awful——"

He stopped short, realizing that he could not hear his own voice! As though a sound-proof curtain had been rolled up, he was abruptly aware of a roaring that filled the cavern like the crash of a Niagara pent up within the narrow space.

The surface of the water near the boat glittered smooth as glass. But in front of each irregular rock pillar it was piled up like the wave at the bow of a fast-moving ship, while at the rear was a glistening hollow where the water was whirled past before it could fill the vacuum caused by its own speed.

The rowboat seemed to float motionless on the glassy surface while the low-hanging roof and rocky pillars swept steadily past at a pace almost as swift as a man could run. While they had watched the struggle of the

serpents, too engrossed even to be conscious of the ever-growing clamor of the falls ahead, the current had caught them in a grip that would be hard to loosen.

"The falls!" Neal shouted.

But even as he spoke, as they whirled under a low spot in the roof, the professor crumpled and slid to the bottom of the boat. A fraction of a second later, before Neal could duck his head, he too was hit on the temple by the low-hanging section of rocky arch. He slumped half over the side of the boat, one hand trailing in the water, a stain of red slowly forming over his eye and running down his cheek.

The flashlight dropped from his limp fingers and sank into the black water, where it flickered for an instant like a phosphorescent fish before it disappeared.

The darkness was absolute. And somewhere in its oppressive folds, swinging aimlessly from side to side, the boat rode the current and bore two unconscious human figures toward the unseen point where the water fell thundering from blackness into deeper blackness.

FAR off in an underground chamber, a last flicker of yellowish light faded out.

That it was an underground chamber was evidenced by the peculiar, blankety texture of the darkness that blotted the dying light. That it was somewhere far from the turmoil of the waterfall could be guessed by the utter soundlessness of the place—a soundlessness of the kind that succeeds the stoppage of some constant noise like the long-accustomed hum of a dynamo or tap of a riveting machine.

Quiescent in the entire lack of sound and light, the air of the room seemed charged with expectance of some happening.

At length, so gradually that one could not have told the precise moment when part of the darkness was mingled with luminosity, a circle of light began to outline itself. More distinctly it shone, until it had the seeming of a four-foot disk of dark blue night sky with a dim moon behind it.

Brighter and brighter became the great disk; and with the growing brightness the blue color faded and left it like an unflecked, burnished sheet of silver. The source of the illumination, whatever it may have been, was peculiar in that it was contained entirely within itself. The room continued dark and indistinguishable although the circle glowed with cold light.

Then the light became inconstant on the face of the disk. It wavered in intensity; streamers played across the smooth surface leaving shadows that moved and intertwined like smoke-wraiths; till a picture was formed that was perfect in every detail.

The picture showed two men in a small rowboat that was floating on the ebony surface of an underground body of water. Over their heads a drab, gray-brown canopy of rock dipped and rose in a bewildering maze of arches. The man who pulled the oars was a giant in size and wore a spiky black beard. The other, a younger man, was clean-shaven and of average build. In his hand was a flashlight which he constantly trained from point to point of sides and overhanging roof.

After a moment or two the pictured lips of the large man moved in speech —and instantly a miracle took place! Syllable for syllable his words were reproduced as they came from his lips —reproduced in a voice that was as staggering as a physical blow!

For it was not a man's deep bass that issued from the disk. It was a woman's voice, marvelous in quality though unvarying and lifeless in monotone; firm and clear, but almost deathly in its lack of spontaneity; an automatic series of vocal sounds that

might have been produced by a beautifully perfect mechanical transmitter, and that was yet imbued with a suggestion of having come from a soft white throat. Could a dead woman speak like a phonograph, or a phonograph acquire the soul of a dead woman—this voice would have been the result!

"——wonder how deep it is. Can you see bottom?"

Perfectly timed with the moving of the bearded lips in the picture came the marvelous but incongruous voice. Startling transmutation—as the male bass rumble was filtered through the disk to sound out in a feminine contralto. Iron into gold, strength into beauty!

The younger man held his flashlight over the side and looked down. His face showed startled and absorbed at something he saw in the water beneath.

"Good God!" His words were mirrored by the same sweet voice, without a ripple of expression or a shading of inflection.

The man at the oars also leaned over the side to stare, and the younger man wondered audibly what would happen if the snaky monster should decide to climb into the boat. The large man pointed and said that another was coming to join it. Then for a time there was silence as they gazed over the side.

Meanwhile the water, pictured soundlessly on the face of the disk, piled higher and higher against the irregular columns that swept past ever more rapidly. Suddenly the younger man looked up, noticed the increased current, and faced his companion in alarm. An instant later a low-hanging rock caught the large man on the back of the head and his friend on the temple as the boat whirled forward. The flashlight dropped from the younger man's hand, splashed into the water and went out.

With its fading brightness the white light left the disk, and it was again a four-foot circle of indigo night sky with a dim moon behind it. This, too, grew fainter and fainter until there was no further speck of illumination in the room.

But before it had faded entirely, silhouetted against it for a moment like the fragment of a nightmare, a weird figure loomed up. Great, columnar legs concealed from just above the knee by some kind of tunic. Huge, bare arms. Gigantic torso swelling into proportionate breadth of shoulder. And, springing up from between the shoulders, with no neck perceivable—a cylindrical head that tapered to a rounded point like a projectile!

There was a rustling of draperies near the disk, and the nightmare figure vanished from sight.

As though an unseen finger had touched an electric button, the room was suddenly flooded with clear amber light.

It was a large chamber, about twice as long as it was wide. Folds of some coarse white material like linen were draped over the walls, entirely concealing them; and at frequent intervals were hung ancient shields of the Roman type, and bladed weapons, of which a preponderance were javelins. The ceiling was also draped with the heavy, linen-like material; and studded into it were plates of some kind of metal which shone like tiny suns and were the source of the yellow light and mild warmth that bathed the room.

There were few furnishings. A hard woven rug of the prevailing white material covered the floor from wall to wall; several plain benches of dull gray metal, and two long tables of the same substance were ranged against the sides; and an ancient Roman sarcophagus, a mammoth thing of sculptured marble, squatted in a corner. There were no doors or windows visible.

At one end of the room was a disk of deeply translucent crystal with a highly polished surface. This glistened sullenly in the light like a circle of indigo night sky. In dimensions it might have been a large round piece of extra heavy plate glass — being barely an inch thick although it was at least four feet in diameter. The rim was jagged and uneven as though small pieces had been chipped off from time to time, always with care exercised to preserve the circular shape.

The coarse white drapery extended behind the disk as it did along the other three walls; but here it hung unevenly, and gave the impression that it was not a wall-covering but a flimsy partition. Evidently there was another, smaller chamber behind the disk.

Suddenly there was a rustling noise, and at the opposite end of the room one of the white drapes was pushed aside with the opening of a hitherto unseen door; and a man stepped in with machine-like strides as though in answer to a summons. He was bare-armed and bare-legged, clad in a one-piece tunic of white material hardly finer in texture than the wall drapes. Across the tunic at the breast were large letters of purple—R E Z. On his feet were metal sandals and on his head was a conical helmet with an indigo blue diamond set in the front of it.

Reverently he strode down the room toward the disk, stopped a few feet in front of it, and bowed low. With his head inclined as though he were silently worshiping a god, but with his face as impassive and expressionless as a mask of wood, he stood there, motionless.

Seeming to come from the heart of the disk, but possibly issuing from the curtains behind it, sounded the marvelous contralto voice. Sonorous words floated out — words of some language unlike any used on earth today, and yet vaguely familiar. Evidently a command was given; for the helmeted figure bowed submissively, answered briefly in the same tongue, and left by the curtained door.

Silence again claimed the big room. The coarse white drapes near the disk swayed as though some huge body on the other side had brushed against them, then were motionless.

5. *The Devil's Gateway*

THE icy chill of the water in which one of his hands was dangling gradually brought Neal to his senses. He groaned, moved slightly in an effort to relieve his back of the ache caused by the thrust of his weight against the side of the boat, and pressed his hand to his temple.

The side of his face was sticky with blood. His forehead throbbed and pulsed unmercifully. In his ears was a roaring like that of a hurricane gone mad. It was pitch-dark, and he seemed to be swaying up and down, and whirling around in circles. He hadn't a notion, for the moment, of where he might be or of what had hit his head. The darkness, and roaring in his ears, and the sensation of swaying dizzily, were no doubt reactions to the blow on his temple. It was all very uncomfortable. . . .

With an exclamation he sat upright as memory returned to him of their position. That hurricane roar in his ears was not an illusion. It was real and appalling—coming from a short distance ahead of them in the darkness where tremendous volumes of water smashed down against more water somewhere far below.

How long he and the professor had lain there helpless while they were being drawn nearer to the unseen brink of the waterfall, he could not guess. Sufficient that the brink was very near now—right at hand if the noise were a true indication. In another moment or two their fragile

boat would be in that welter of smashing water!

He felt his way toward the oars, stumbling and nearly going over the side as the boat rocketed against something and caromed away again. The professor was lying across the rower's seat still senseless; but as he touched the bearded face in the darkness he could feel a tremor of returning consciousness. He dashed some water over his friend's neck and forehead, and a moment later Sanderson sat up, clutching heavily at the hand he held out in the dark to help him.

It was impossible to make his voice heard in the roar of the waterfall so close to them, so he shook the heavy shoulders to hasten the return of consciousness, and tried to take a place at the oars. He felt himself pushed impatiently away, felt the boat heave slightly to the urge of the professor's strokes. . . .

It was too late for rowing to save them. The oar blades were whirled forward by the current almost faster than they could be pulled. Neal knew they were certain to go over and down to the black depths below unless a miracle happened. He knew the professor must realize it also, though the boat still quivered to his mighty strokes. The main hope was that the falls were not so high as the stunning noise indicated.

A mist of spray suddenly damped his face, and the air trembled still more wildly with the smash of tons of falling water. The prow of the boat wavered sickeningly as the support of the water beneath it was abruptly withdrawn. For an instant it sagged in empty space; then the rear of the boat shot up as though thrown by a sling. He jumped to clear himself, felt himself hurtling down through wet black air. Then he plunged head first into a seething insanity of water, going far under the surface, rolled over by currents and cross currents that seemed about to tear him to pieces.

ETERNITIES later he struggled slowly to the surface, gasping and strangling in air so filled with spray that it was hardly more life-giving than the water itself. Fighting to breathe, he managed weakly to keep his head above the surface for a time while the whirling currents bore him away from the cauldron at the foot of the falls. It was impossible to swim; even the effort to keep from going under was too much to prolong for more than a few moments when he was starving for air. Each time he was dragged below the surface by the current, he felt he could never fight his way up again.

Something clamped over his shoulder, and he had an instant's vision of the horrible yellow water-serpents with the whip-lash tails.

But it was a human hand, big and steady, comforting at the moment as an answer to prayer. He felt himself guided toward a floating object—a large fragment of the rowboat. He rested in this comparative safety, without thought of what disasters the next moment might bring, while the current carried them steadily away from the waterfall. Gradually the roaring subsided until he could hear Sanderson's shout as to whether he was all right. He answered with a touch of his hand. The whirling eddies ceased to toss them so wildly, and at length they drifted into stillness.

Suddenly the professor's voice sounded in the darkness. "Look! Is that a light—or am I imagining it?"

"It's a light," replied Neal after a moment. "But there's something else—steam or something. . . ."

Gradually, as they were borne toward it, the patch of illumination grew clearer. At first it appeared to be an irregular white curtain of flimsy cloth waving in a wind. Then it could be seen that it was steam, rising up from some point near the water level and faintly lighted from behind.

At this point, like the walls of a theater curving to a focus on the stage, the cave curved to an end. But in spite of this there was no lessening of the steady current that dragged them on!

"A subterranean outlet!" exclaimed the professor, and for the first time Neal could see his face, white and strained. "The water sweeps under that end wall. Somehow we've got to keep from being swept with it."

"There's a ledge in front of the steam," replied Neal. "Perhaps we can reach that and climb up."

They urged their boat timber toward the right, making for the recess in the sheer wall.

"The outlet must be just to the left of the ledge," called Sanderson. "Try to steady me while I crawl on top of these timbers. If I can just get enough purchase to raise myself as we pass the ledge——"

The floating wood sank under him a bit, but with Neal's help he managed to get one foot into place and remain fairly upright. The ledge was within a few feet now.

As they floated by he raised himself toward it and sprang. The timbers sank under his full weight—but not before he had grasped the rock shelf. He writhed to security and turned to help Neal, and in a moment had pulled him from the water.

Their position, however, was hardly improved; in a few minutes they would certainly strangle in the steam-laden atmosphere.

"We've got to get out of this—somewhere," Neal panted. "And we can't go back the way we came. There's only one direction left."

"Through the steam," agreed the professor. "And beyond—to wherever that light is coming from."

Rising uncertainly, they groped their way into the clouds of vapor. . . .

As Neal felt his way along, his foot suddenly slipped over the edge of the opening from which the steam was seething up—a sheer wall going down to unguessable depths below him. It was impossible to see how wide the crevice was—impossible to see anything in the blind air. It might be four feet across or it might be forty. Behind it lay the positive barrier of the waterfall. Before it was at least the chance bred by hope.

Taking a long breath he jumped for the opposite, unseen edge.

He just made it, landing on hands and knees, with one foot dangling over the brink of the narrow chasm. A few more steps and the cloud thinned. With his lungs bursting and his skin feeling as though rinsed in scalding water, he staggered out into pure cool air and lay down at full length, fearful that the professor had not felt the crevice in time to escape falling, but Neal was too exhausted even to call out to him.

Vaguely he realized that he was in yet another cavern, that it was very large and somehow brightly illuminated with clear yellow light like that of the sun. Then the reaction to the blow on his temple, to the shock of the plunge over the falls, and to the terrific heat exposure, drew a black curtain over his senses even as he was trying to rise and go back into the steam to find the professor.

Some little time later, Neal stirred, recovered consciousness with a realization of burning thirst and cramped limbs, and opened his eyes to the wonder of the place in which he found himself.

The cave of the lake, the subterranean waterfall, the steam chamber—all had been strange enough; but they were normal, fashioned by the forces of nature. This tremendous cavern that stretched up and away like an enormous ballroom had either been retouched, or completely built by the hand of man!

Laboriously hewn and smoothed into symmetry, the lofty roof extended on and on in a continuous peaked

arch like the ceiling of a Gothic cathedral. Across this at regular intervals were transverse arches; and at each central junction a tremendous column of natural stone tapered up from the smooth floor to flare at the top in arboreal support. Along the walls and peaked roof were mistily painted grotesque monsters of which a distorted representation of the sulfur-colored water-serpents recurred oftenest. Between each two of the columns, set into the rock ceiling, was a round metal plate that gave out warm yellow rays precisely like the rays of the sun.

It was like a vast church gone mad! Weird wall and ceiling decorations portrayed devilish things instead of saints and angels. Hot yellow light poured from the curious plates, instead of dim cool colors filtering through stained windows. An intangible atmosphere of demoniac evil replaced the air of placid sanctitude that hovers over earthly cathedrals. One could picture hordes of slack-mouthed fanatics assembled here to worship a creature whose lust was for blood and supreme sacrifice and whose power lay rooted in sovereign fear.

If any doubt had still remained in his mind as to the actual existence of the Monster of Evil the professor hunted, it was dispelled by the sight of this enormous chamber that was his handiwork. For this was plainly no chance-found ruin of ancient times, at least as we know of them. Here was no trace of Egyptian or Phenician craft. More, being in perfect repair as it was, it told of present-day labor and supervision. It was as freshly kept up as any modern edifice. And those mysterious illuminating plates—no forgotten and long-dead race had contrived those, or left them to shine through centuries to the present day. They were new, and affixed by the command of a brain that must be alive, and somewhere near, at that very moment!

What could be the nature and appearance of the owner of that brain? What genius had caused this wonder to be built far below the earth's surface? The professor had a few blurred pictures of a human-seeming Thing with a weird head. But what was it really like? Did it love and hate and eat and sleep as other mortals—or was it some kind of bloodless, superhuman creature such as the world has never produced before? Was it made of totally different flesh, perhaps, a new species of superman that needed no food nor rest and felt no emotion?

And what could be the character of the subjects of this monstrous and uncanny king? For subjects he must have by the thousands. The incredible labor represented in the hollowing of this great mock-cathedral from the solid rock proved that; and there must be much more of the underground construction: the great cave was entirely deserted and no sound of life penetrated to it from any point around. How much more, and how marvelous the life and contrivances it all might contain, could only be guessed at. But what could the workmen responsible for the marvels be like? Men or machines? Animals, or——

His thoughts trailed off into wild imaginings of monstrous and inhuman beings with ten legs, possibly, and a score of arms—improbable and nightmare figures. It was easy to imagine the improbable here, to build up mental pictures of creatures such as no natural laws would allow to come into being. And yet—no natural laws could account for such a creation as the Devil whose existence was now definitely proved by this huge cave that was his anteroom, and against whom Sanderson and he had elected to cast their absurdly frail strength!

However, no matter what the nature and form of the Black Monarch of evil and his thousands of subjects might be, it would do no good to re-

main here and rot in useless conjecture. All he could do was—go on and see what befell him.

He shuddered and got to his feet, overwhelmed by a rush of awful loneliness as he stood, a tiny thing, a mite in the vast, brooding silence of the hall. He was terribly alone. Sanderson was lying at the bottom of the steam crevice—there was probably a lake of boiling water in those depths. The little expedition of two had reached the threshold of the Dark Ruler at last; but now the leader of the expedition was gone; and he was left alone to find death or escape. And death seemed very near, escape appallingly remote.

He sighed, squared his shoulders, and began to walk down the great cavern—naked as the first man in a malign Eden.

At the end of the hall were four tunnels leading off in four different directions. They were all lit by the sun-like metal plates, and all identical in size and appearance. Which of the four exits he should take was a matter he could not determine. One might lead to the outside world and safety, and its next-door neighbor might take him to direct capture by whatever freakish beings lived here. In either event he had no way of knowing beforehand; and he must go somewhere, quickly, in the hope of finding water to quench his thirst.

It was maddening, that thirst! Every drop of moisture seemed to have been drained from him in the heat of the steam chamber. Every fiber in him called for water. Without paying much attention to where he was going, he pushed into the nearest tunnel. Branching off from this were other runways; and soon he could not have found his way back to the huge cavern of the murals if he had so desired.

At last he heard the sound he was listening for—the drip of water. He started to run in its direction, came into another vast cave—and instantly drew back to hide himself in the tunnel mouth!

He had caught his first glimpse of the creatures that inhabited this subterranean kingdom.

The appalling weird being whom Neal and the professor are fighting enters the story in vivid and startling manner in next month's installment.

THE HAUNTED CHESSMEN

by E. R. PUNSHON

"All about was fury, a hurrying to and fro of strange, evil things."

1. The Black Queen

IT WAS in Fred Kerr's rooms that I saw them first. For a wonder Kerr was by himself; he was the most popular man I ever knew, I think, and it was the rarest thing in the world to find him alone. But that I had done so this evening rather pleased me, for I was very full of my success against Jenoure Baume, and very anxious to tell Kerr all about it. Even he had never yet beaten Jenoure Baume.

Of course, Baume isn't a master of chess in the sense that are Lasker and Capablanca. Still, for a common or garden player like myself, with a purely local reputation, to beat him is something of an achievement, and I wanted very much to tell Kerr of my success. He was very sympathetic and very interested, and in analyzing the game with me he pointed out a move Jenoure Baume might have made which would almost certainly have cost me my queen. Fortunately Baume had not seen it—nor had I for that matter—and I told Kerr he really ought to go in for chess seriously.

"Not enough open air about it for me," he answered laughingly. "I'll take it up when I'm sixty." When I rose to go he mentioned that the date of his wedding had been fixed for the following month.

I congratulated him warmly—Lady Norah was a charming girl, and the match most suitable in every way—and in one of his little confidential outbursts that everyone found charming he told me how happy he was and how fortunate he counted himself.

"And is that one of the wedding presents?" I asked, nodding toward a set of chessmen standing on a board on a small side-table.

I had noticed them as soon as I entered the room. Of Indian workmanship as I guessed, they were very beautifully carved and polished, and when I looked at them again I was conscious of a curious impression. I can not define it exactly—but it was almost as though they moved and stirred, as though they all watched eagerly, intently. The idle thought came to me that those inanimate carved pieces of polished bone were watching me as a spider from its web watches a fly hovering near.

Vexed with myself for having such foolish fancies—I remember I thought they were due to the strain of my game with Jenoure Baume—I went over to look at them more closely.

"Awfully fine carving!" I said, picking up one of the white pieces. "Indian, isn't it? Are they a wedding present?"

"No," Kerr answered. "The fact is, I bought them from poor Will Lathbury's widow."

"Oh, indeed!" I said.

I had only met Lathbury once or twice, but, of course, I knew him well by reputation as a sound, steady player, and the mysterious tragedy that had ended his life had been a great shock to me.

"Those were the pieces they found near him," Kerr added.

Poor Lathbury had been discovered one morning lying dead across his chessboard, on which he had apparently been working out some problem, or analyzing a game. The razor with which he had cut his throat was in his hand, and there was no faintest explanation possible of his miserable deed. It was certainly shown in evidence that for a day or two before the end he had seemed slightly worried, and had spoken about some game of chess or problem that appeared to be troubling him. And he had complained of not sleeping very well, a most unusual thing with him. But that was all. The coroner suggested that his mind had become affected by his intense application to his favorite game, but that was all rubbish. However, the jury returned the usual verdict, and there the matter had to rest.

"Are they ivory?" I asked, looking more closely at the piece I was handling.

"Well, the story goes," answered Kerr, with a touch of hesitation—"the story goes that they are made from human bones."

"Oh, Lord!" I said, putting down a little quickly the piece I was holding.

"I don't know if it's true," Kerr added; "very likely it isn't. It may be just a yarn. But the tale is that an Indian raja some time in the Middle Ages captured a hated enemy, killed him, and had these made from his bones."

"Ugh!" I said. "What an idea! What on earth made you get them?"

"I hardly know," he answered. "Mrs. Lathbury wanted to get rid of them—naturally. They hadn't very pleasant associations for her. She asked me what they ought to fetch. I said I would take them if she liked. I thought it was a way to help her, and then it's lovely carving."

"Rather too lovely for me," I said, and I could have sworn that the black queen turned her head and shot at me a glance of malignant and deadly hatred.

Of course, the notion was absurd, and when I looked again I saw the piece as immobile as any other bit of carved bone. And yet when I looked a third time I was once more aware of that air of cruel and furtive waiting as of some evil thing lurking patiently which before had seemed to me to hover over those two double rows of carved figures.

Determined to conquer my fancies, I picked up the black queen and, examining it more closely, I thought I made out that it was a trick in the

arrangement of the eyes which gave the piece that aspect of alert watchfulness I had noticed.

"Carved out of human bones!" I repeated, weighing the piece in my hand. "What an idea! Well, shall we have a little game?"

I thought Kerr looked startled and even a little alarmed. He shook his head quickly without speaking. I felt relieved; for the idea was powerfully in my mind that it was not against him that I must play, but against some other—some unknown—antagonist.

I said good-night a little hurriedly and took myself off. The fact is, I had wanted to play so badly that I felt that if I stayed there much longer with that black queen in my hand and the pieces drawn up ready, I should find myself making the first move—against whom, I wondered? Whom or what?

I remembered very plainly that as I went out of the room I had a last impression of those pieces drawn up in line as though waiting—waiting with a malign and dreadful patience.

I know my heart was beating faster than usual, and my forehead was a little damp as I came out into the street. The idea was with me that I had escaped some great danger, but what or why I had no idea.

2. A Soul in Torment

A week or two passed, and I remembered my experience of that night only to be ashamed of the inexplicable agitation I had felt. Then one day I happened to meet Baume. He knew Kerr fairly well, and declared he was wasting on other pursuits talents that had been meant for chess alone. Then I chanced to mention those curious carved bone chessmen.

"He says they are made of human bone," I remarked with a laugh. "Gruesome idea, isn't it?"

To my surprize Baume looked very grave. Apparently the old man knew those chessmen well—and did not like them. Finally he blurted out: "You tell your friend to drop them in the river. That is best for them."

Going home that night I noticed on the placard of one of the evening papers, "Mysterious Suicide," and on that of another, "Strange West End Tragedy." I paid no attention just then, but the next morning over breakfast I noticed a column headed, "Mysterious Death of Well-known Sportsman," and, on glancing at it, I saw that it referred to poor Fred Kerr.

He had been found first thing in the morning lying dead with a bullet through his brain. The pistol with which he had committed the miserable deed was still clasped in his right hand, and the account mentioned that the body lay across a chessboard on which the pieces were arranged in what seemed an unfinished game.

It was a frightful shock to me—indeed it must have been so to all who knew Kerr. I could hardly believe that a man so full of life and spirit, so richly dowered with all good gifts, had ended his life in such a way. There was no explanation. At the inquest a verdict of accidental death was returned, the idea being that Kerr had shot himself while cleaning or examining his pistol.

An attempt was made to suggest foul play on the grounds that the position of the pieces on the chessboard showed that a game had just been concluded, that this game must have been played with someone, and that that someone had disappeared and was, therefore, under suspicion.

Conclusive evidence showed, however, that the unhappy man had been alone all that evening. Of course, the position of the pieces might be accounted for in many ways. He might have been working out an end game, or analyzing some position. It was not a problem he had been working

on, though, as black was winning and, of course, the problem convention is for white to win.

However, not much attention was paid to the chessmen; and as foul play was ruled out and suicide seemed incredible, the jury fell back on the idea of accident, though there was not the least support for such a theory.

Poor Kerr! I called to leave a wreath and express my sympathy. I asked if I might see my old friend for the last time, and they agreed. With feelings of the utmost sadness I looked my last on my friend's face, and as I did so there came upon me slowly, irresistibly, the idea that he had died in terror and anguish of soul and body.

I felt this impression slowly invade and possess my mind, till I shook and trembled with the knowledge that I stood in the presence of unnamable dread. I began to edge slowly away toward the door, very slowly, for I knew that if I went quickly my panic would overcome me, and I should run, and I knew that would be very dangerous, fatal perhaps. By an intense effort of will I kept my face toward the bed in which lay that which I no longer regarded as the earthly frame of my friend, but felt was changed into something unspeakably horrible and foul. My hair bristled; the flesh crept upon my bones; I forced myself to keep my eyes fixed steadily on the still form upon the bed, though I was sure it was watching me with an intent and evil patience as a spider in its web watches the fly fluttering near—the very sensation I had had before.

Somehow or other, I don't know how, I got to the bottom of the stairs. I stood there, a little dizzy, a little faint, trying to recover myself.

Presently I got out into the street somehow, and I know that for some time afterward I had no liking for the dark and no taste for being alone.

3. The Gates of Hell

Poor Kerr had been the owner of a good many curios he had collected, some of them of value, and when I heard after a time that his friends had decided to sell them at auction, I thought I would go and see if I could pick up some little memento of one I had so much admired and liked.

I bought two rather fine engravings by Meryon; very cheap they were, too. I noticed Mark Norand, the captain of our class chess club match team, and after speaking a word or two to him, I was thinking of going when the auctioneer put up the carved bone chessmen.

He did not repeat the tale that they were of human bone—perhaps he thought that wouldn't sound very attractive, or he may not have known the story—but he laid great emphasis on the excellence of the carving. Mark Norand made the first bid, and I know I was very startled. Somehow I hadn't thought of anyone actually buying the things. I said to him:

"I wouldn't have them if I were you."

He looked at me with rather a puzzled and slightly suspicious air.

"Why, do you want them yourself?" he asked.

"Good heavens, no!" I answered, but I could see he did not quite believe me.

In the auction room everyone is inclined to be suspicious of everyone else. It is a warfare there without quarter and without scruple. Mark Norand was a friend of mine, but he did not mean to be done out of any bargain that was going. He bought the chessmen for three guineas—cheap enough, considering the excellence of the carving.

He was very pleased with himself and his purchase, and his idea that he had got ahead of me. He asked me to go round and play a game with his new possessions. I refused pointblank, and he laughed. I think he believed I

was a little piqued at losing the chessmen.

We got busier than ever at the office, and I was kept very much occupied for some time. I could not even get a spare hour to slip round to the club for a game, and it was quite by accident that I happened to hear someone mention Mark Norand and say that he was looking very ill.

I knew where it was he generally lunched. The place was out of the way for me, and I didn't like the cooking there, but I went the next day. Almost the first man I saw when I entered was Norand. He was sitting at one of the tables with food before him, but he had pushed it away untasted and was pouring over a chessboard.

"Hullo, Norand," I said, "working out a problem?"

He looked up at me. I could not help starting. He was greatly altered, but it was not that I noticed so much as the horrid fear I saw peeping out from his bloodshot eyes and lurking in the new lines that had come about his mouth.

"Oh, you?" he said, and to mingle with the fear I read in his eyes there came a fierce dull resentment, so that he looked at me as though he held me for his deadliest enemy.

"You knew, didn't you? Why didn't you tell me?" he demanded.

"Knew what? Tell you what?" I asked.

"Those chessmen," he muttered, shuddering. He added: "Why did you let me buy them?"

"I told you not to; I warned you," I said.

"Told me not to, warned me not to!" he repeated, and gave me a look of deadly hate. "If you saw a man knocking at the gate of hell without knowing it, would you just tell him not to do that and then walk away?"

"Why, what's the matter?" I asked.

He did not answer, and the waiter came up just then. I ordered the first thing I saw on the bill. Norand had become intent on his game again. I noticed it was a position in a game and not a problem he was working at—and the waiter, who knew him as an old customer, and saw I was a friend, observed to me:

"The gentleman's worrying too much over his chess. He hardly eats anything now."

"Has he been long like this?" I asked.

"Only about a week, sir," the man answered.

He brought me what I had ordered, and Norand looked up presently.

"What do you think of this position?" he asked.

"Well, white looks in rather a fix," I answered. "Good Lord, what's the matter?"

I really thought he was going to have a fit; he fell back in his seat, panting for breath and ghastly pale. I might have pronounced his death warrant. I jumped up with some vague idea of getting a doctor, but he stopped me.

"No, no, I'm all right," he said—croaked, rather. "For God's sake, look at the board, and see if you can find any way out!"

"For white?" I asked.

"For white," he repeated.

I bent over the board. It seemed to me mate was pretty sure to come in three or four moves. I said:

"Is it a game you're playing?"

He nodded.

"Who's your opponent?" I asked.

He did not answer, and I could see well that a secret and terrible agitation possessed him.

"I don't know," he stammered.

And the idea came to me that he did know but that he dared not say. This seemed to me highly absurd and at the same time quite reasonable.

He wiped his face again.

"You see," he argued, "the thing's impossible."

"I don't know what you mean; I

don't know what you are talking about," I said angrily.

But the idea burnt in my mind like fire, that I did know and that I also dared not say.

He leant across the table, his eyes alight with that mingled desperate fear and deadly hate I had seen in them before.

"You ought to have warned me," he muttered. "Mind this, if I lose I will leave you the things in my will."

I remember it did not seem in any way absurd that he should couple together the ideas of losing the game and of making his will.

I was studying the position of the pieces so intently that I, like him, pushed aside my lunch almost untasted. Gradually there was coming back to me a memory of the move poor Kerr had suggested Jenoure Baume might have tried in the game he lost to me. It seemed to me a variation of Kerr's idea might be effective in Norand's present position.

I explained the move. Norand jumped at the idea. We developed it together and, so far as we could see, an attack pressed on those lines was practically sure to win the game. Norand's relief was tremendous, mine scarcely less so. Then all at once his expression changed. He said:

"Suppose when I play the knight it slips of itself on to some other square when I'm not looking?"

I stared at him and laughed. The suggestion seemed so absurd I could not help it.

"Well, of course," I said, "if your pieces do that, I don't see much chance."

He did not answer, and I left the restaurant and went back to the office feeling relieved in one way, but a good deal worried about poor Norand all the same. His obvious terror, my own odd impressions, all seemed to me fanciful and even ridiculous in the face of his wild suggestion of pieces that moved of their own volition.

All the same I was not surprized when, a day or two later, I heard that the poor fellow had drowned himself in a small pond that lay at the foot of his garden. The account in the papers said he had been sitting up late at chess and that he must have gone straight from the chessboard to his doom.

4. The Invisible Antagonist

I COULD not help making some inquiries about the position of the men on the board. I found, as I had half expected, that they indicated the close of a game in which black had just brought off a mate. My informant told me that presumably poor Norand had been analyzing some game. He had not been working out a problem, as black was the winning side; and he had not been playing with anyone, as the evidence showed conclusively that he had been alone all the evening.

The usual verdict was returned, and I wrote to Norand's solicitor to say that I absolutely refused to accept any legacy he might have left me.

But I did not post the letter. At one time I had the feeling that the whole thing was pure fancy and that it would be foolish and cowardly to refuse the chessmen if he had really left them to me. And then, again, the idea would come to me that it was all true, but that I was forewarned, and forearmed.

As it happened, they were delivered one evening while the vicar was with me. While he was there I opened the parcel and showed him the chessmen. He was mildly interested and mildly shocked when I told him the tale that they were carved from human bone. He thought it a most repulsive idea, but remarked on the excellence of the carving.

"That black queen, for example," he said, "what an idea of—of—well, vitality, almost, that figure has."

I agreed, and after I had seen the vicar to the door I went back to my room. I found those chessmen I had

left lying on the table where the vicar had been looking at them, now all drawn up in position on the board.

No living soul, I knew well, had been in the room during my short absence. I stood for a moment or two on the threshold, a little daunted, a little confused, and as I watched I understood that I was expected to play—I saw, too, a thrill of sinister impatience run through the drawn-up lines of the pieces.

I sat down in front of them. I could not help myself. Each separate piece, from king to pawn, showed animate, palpitating, ready, one and all a-quiver with desire and greed, like hungry beasts of prey waiting for their living victim to be thrown to them. The impression grew in my mind that I was in a more dreadful and more imminent danger than any other living man that night, and that this danger was one that threatened not my life only.

I would have fled, but flight, I knew well, was no longer possible. I tried to mutter a prayer, but the words would not come. I tried to lift my hand to push board and pieces to the ground, but I seemed to have lost control of my arm. The quivering, eager, evil impatience of the pieces increased; I should not have been surprized to see them break into some wild dance of hideous ritual.

All at once they grew quiet, though still instinct with vivid, hungry eagerness, and I felt come upon me a sudden awe and fear and horror as I realized that my antagonist was there.

I could see nothing, I heard nothing, only I knew well that he was there, that he had come and was seated opposite.

I understood the game was about to begin.

I could not help myself. Slowly I lifted my hand. I swear I did not touch it, but the king's pawn it had been my thought to move slid forward two squares.

A moment's pause and then the black king's pawn, untouched, moved forward in reply. I made my next move, or rather, when I raised my hand with the intention of doing it, the piece transferred itself untouched to the position I had in mind. The answering move came almost at once. And so the game was played on.

All the time I never touched a piece; once I had made up my mind and raised my hand the piece I was thinking of immediately took up the position I wished. The black pieces did the same; they moved, advanced, retreated, but all in harmony and all in evident obedience to the will of my unseen, unknown antagonist.

Invisible, but not unknown.

For I was very sure there sat opposite me a man long dead, with an evil face and cruel eyes and hungry, slobbering mouth, wearing the jeweled robes of an Indian prince, and playing with all his skill this game for his master in which the prize was—myself.

I knew that now the game had begun, it had to be finished. I called up all my powers to my aid. I felt my mind grow clear; my nerves were calm and steady. I played my best. I played as I had never played before; I believe I played that night a game that would not have disgraced a master.

More than once I felt I had my antagonist in difficulties, but each time he retrieved himself. I won a pawn, but lost it again. Still, I began to believe I had a chance of winning.

I pressed hard. I felt a clearness in my brain, a vividness of thought and clearness of vision I have never known before or since. Once or twice, when I was tempted to make a move that might have been dangerous, it was as though I heard a secret whisper warning me to be careful. I knew, too, that my antagonist was troubled, and I understood that the pieces themselves, both black and white, felt this, and were troubled also.

I had begun a hot attack on the black queen. If I could win her I

felt the game would be mine. It was not only that the queen is the most powerful piece, but I realized also that in her lay the focus of the opposing power, that from her or through her there radiated a sort of vigor and encouragement all the other pieces felt—and not the black only but my own white as well.

My attack on the queen failed. I was a move too late, and she slipped out of the net I had so nearly drawn around her. The failure left my position less strong, and I found myself attacked in my turn. I rallied my forces, but the pressure grew stronger and stronger.

The critical point was on my left, where I was beginning to plan a counter-attack. It promised well, and I was beginning to make progress when I found a return thrust aimed at me.

I was puzzled, and, on looking, found that the position of my pieces was no longer as it had been, but a much weaker one. I could not understand, for I was sure I had not moved them. As I looked and wondered I was aware that my unseen antagonist smiled evilly to himself, and the black queen shook with a horrid, secret merriment that spread and spread till every piece upon the board, black and white, was laughing wickedly to itself, rejoicing in the prospect of my defeat.

I realized in a flash that one of my pawns had turned traitor and, when I was not looking, had slipped back from the square where I had placed it to the one behind, where it was so much less effective.

5. *At the Eleventh Hour*

It cost me my bishop before I could re-establish my position, and the small inner voice I had seemed to hear before whispered to me that I must watch closely and unceasingly, or the same thing would happen again. I understood that my antagonist, smiling evilly to himself, could make any one of my pieces betray me, and that this foul play he kept ever in reserve to help him at need. No wonder that he always won his games all through the centuries!

I was a piece to the bad now, and I had the double strain of playing and of watching to see that none of my men slipped from the squares on which I had placed them. I set my teeth and played my best. I lost another piece, and my king, hotly attacked, was pinned into one corner. Still I fought on, though my brow was wet and my hands shook, and upon me lay the consciousness of impending doom.

I made one last feeble attempt at a counter-attack. I do not think it could possibly have saved me, but it was audacious, a little disconcerting, and meant delay at the least. And that was something, for I knew that if I could hold out till cock-crow I should earn at least a day's respite. That my antagonist knew also, and he grew, one must suppose, impatient.

I was watching my pieces intently, since there was not one of them but would have played the traitor had chance offered. My new attack hinged on the one rook I had remaining, and suddenly I saw it sliding away from where it stood to an adjoining square, where it would have been comparatively useless. It stopped when my eye fell on it, for apparently they had no power to move when I was watching, and then something made me look away again. Instantly the rook slipped off to the adjoining square, and at once again all the other pieces, black and white alike, shook with a passion of secret, evil laughter.

For a moment despair overcame me, for now it was only a question of mate in two moves.

But, as before a tiny voice had whispered to me to be cautious when I had contemplated an unsound move, so now again I heard that small, still voice sound clear and vivid in my ear. I knew that my one hope was to do as it advised.

I sprang to my feet.

Pointing at the rook that had moved I cried with a loud voice:

"I appeal."

I was aware of an instant, fierce commotion all around me; I saw the pieces, black and white, all palpitant; I heard no sound, but I knew that my antagonist was dismayed and troubled.

Again I cried:

"I appeal."

The fierce tumult and commotion I was aware of all round, grew yet wilder and more fierce. Though I heard nothing, saw nothing, I knew that all about was fury, dismay, excitement, a hurrying to and fro of strange and evil things, a passage of vast and awful shadows. The pieces were all quivering with hatred and alarm. My dread, long-dead antagonist seemed to me to be screaming hoarsely in an agony of protest and pain. Though still I heard, saw, felt nothing, I was somehow conscious that I stood in the very center of a chaos of invisible, conflicting powers; that unimaginable forces were aimed against me, but that nevertheless I stood protected. For the third time I cried out very loudly:

"I appeal."

That strange and awful tumult passed. All was still and silent, all that had filled my small room so dreadfully fled swiftly far away. The chessmen were no longer animate and palpitant, but were quiet as any other bits of carved bone; I had a vision of my antagonist, baffled, howling, far in the depths of the nethermost space.

I knew I was safe now, and I knew also what next I had to do. The still, small voice I had heard before had whispered that to me also, and I hurried to obey. I swept the chessmen into their box, and carrying it carefully in my hands, I went into the garden, out by the side gate, and up the lane that leads to the churchyard.

Dawn was gray in the east; the cocks were crowing as I reached it. There amidst the graves, in the earth consecrated by holy words for the last resting-place of men, I dug with my bare hands and buried deep the box and the pieces of carved bone it held, deep in the shadow of a cross reared on a grave near by. There I left them to rest for ever; and so, drunk with weariness and terror, went back to my home to rest in peace and thankfulness and safety.

The FLOWING DEATH

By ARLTON EADIE

"Where am I?" he asked faintly.

"HAROLD! Harold! I really think Uncle has discovered something at last!" came in loud, excited accents from the terrace overlooking the tennis-court.

I paused in the act of tightening the net, and looked up at the entrancing vision in white leaning over the stone balustrade.

Speaking candidly, the news she had just announced failed to awake in me anything like the surprize and delight that it evidently had done in her. When a man, old enough to know better, spends the whole of his days—and occasionally half his nights—messing about with mysterious concoctions in a laboratory whose unspeakable atmosphere would at times leave a soap-factory a very bad second, it is scarcely surprizing if, in the course of time, he does "discover something." But when I hinted as much to Mavis it did not have much effect in dampening her enthusiasm.

"But I think it must be something really important this time," she persisted. "He did not remain in his laboratory later than half past 10 last night, and he ate his breakfast this morning after being only twice reminded that it was getting cold. And he has just asked me to tell you that he wishes to see you in the laboratory at once."

I may as well confess that what scientific knowledge I happen to possess is of the most sketchy description. The only recollection I treasure of the much-boomed technical course of my school days is the manufacture of hydrogen (or was it oxygen?) on a non-commercial scale over a bowl of water. Probably I should not have remembered even that, had it not been for the painful after-effects of the explosion which ensued on the application of a lighted match to the stuff at the conclusion of the experiment. But with Professor Owen

Boyd-Phulger, Sc.D., LL.D., F.R.S., F.S.A., the case was, naturally, different. The only things he didn't know about chemistry and biology were the things that hadn't been discovered! But the fact that several learned societies had allowed him to tack half the alphabet behind his name did not prevent the man himself from being a well-meaning, but none the less deadly, bore. It may give some slight indication of the depth of my affection for his niece when I say that it was solely to be near her that I witnessed innumerable intricate, but to me unintelligible, experiments and submitted like a lamb to form the audience to the old fossil's interminable lectures. Indeed, so well had I played my part that he had at last come to regard me as being as much interested in his beloved researches as he was himself; with the result that he now confidently expected me to forego a set with the dearest little girl on earth in order to listen to yards of his twaddle in a stuffy laboratory. Truly has it been said that duplicity brings its own punishment!

Something of the nature of my inward musings must have betrayed itself on my face, for there was a glint of mischievous amusement in Mavis' eyes as she went on: "I'm afraid, however, that you'll soon have to tear yourself away from the scientific atmosphere you love so much! I shall send an urgent message for you in about twenty minutes."

"Remember, that's a promise!" I retorted, as I made my way toward the house.

THE moment I entered the laboratory I could see that Mavis had not exaggerated the importance of the occasion. Instead of being in his customary state of dreamy absent-mindedness, the old boy was dancing about all over the place. As a rule I find it politic to encourage him to do most of the talking, but on this occasion there was not the slightest need for any such exercise of tact. Before I could utter a word he had jammed me down on a most uncomfortable wooden seat in front of a high-power microscope.

"I shall be famous, Harold—famous!" He appeared to be almost hysterical with delight as he chortled out the words. "I have made the discovery of the century—nay, more—the greatest discovery of all time! Look for yourself, my boy!"

I accordingly looked, but all I could make out was a small, irregular-shaped blob of dirty-looking gray jelly. Having been prepared to behold something really exciting, I experienced a distinct sense of having been sold, and I had a good mind to tell him so. On second thought, however, I contented myself with inquring what the thing was.

Instead of returning a simple answer to my simple question, the old fossil must needs lean over the bench as though he were addressing a conclave of highbrows, clear his throat, and launch into a lecture.

"Of all the problems that have exercised the mind of mankind since the first glimmerings of the dawn of science, there is none that has been the cause of so much research, controversy, and—I regret having to add—bitterness, as the problem of the origin of life. I have only to mention the illustrious names of Huxley, Von Bunge, Schwann, Balbiani, Roux and Le Dantec"—he rolled the names round his mouth as though he relished the taste of them—"to convince you that some of the finest intellects in Europe have been brought to bear on the subject. Yet, in spite of this, the solution seemed as remote as ever until I made my startling discovery last night."

That made me open my eyes a little. "What?" I exclaimed; "you mean that you have solved the problem yourself?"

The professor shook his head. "My

dear Harold," he answered, with an almost pitying smile, "I should have thought that even the most superficial acquaintance with the English tongue would have told you that my words were intended to convey no such claim. Are you not aware that the immortal Darwin himself had declared that one might as reasonably seek for the origin of matter as that of life?"

Frankly, I had not been aware of the fact. But I thought it best to let him ramp on in his own sweet way in order not to prolong the interview.

"What I have succeeded in doing," he went on presently, "is to determine the actual living protoplasm which is the physical basic material of which ourselves and all other living things on this planet are composed. Even your intelligence will grasp the fact that to discover the bricks of which a building is composed is a very different thing from determining how those same bricks came to be in existence. That simple analogy applies to my discovery. I have separated the highly complex material which forms the basic principle of life; I have ascertained that it is composed of millions of microscopic animalcules which live, breathe, assimilate food and multiply—but the great problem of how this protoplasm came originally to be endowed with life remains as far from solution as ever."

A flash of inspiration came to me. "The cell theory!" I cried; and the old man's beaming face told me that my chance shot had indeed hit the mark.

"You're right, Harold. Ah, I have hopes yet — hopes," he muttered, rather inconsequentially, I thought. "Yes, it is the cell theory, as you say. But it is the cell theory adapted and changed."

I thought it best not to jeopardize my newly-won laurels by venturing another suggestion; so I contented myself with murmuring "Really?" in as impressed a manner as possible.

"The organism you have just examined in that microscope — if, indeed, one may so describe a speck of matter which, though undoubtedly alive, possesses neither heart, lungs, stomach, brain nor even skin, consisting as it does of one homogeneous substance — this animalcule represents the earliest, the lowest, the most simple and primitive form of life yet known to science. I am of course aware that several similar organisms have been previously discovered; in fact, one species of ameba, the *Proteus animalcule,* is quite a common object observed under the microscope. It abounds in stagnant ponds, or may be readily acquired by infusing ordinary hay in water and allowing it to stand. But these"—he waved a triumphant hand in the direction of the things I had been looking at—"are a species of infusoria entirely different. Not only do they transcend all others in their tenacity of life and the extreme rapidity with which they multiply, but they are infinitely more adaptable to their environment and the conditions of food obtainable—I was almost about to say more educative. It is an absolute fact that in the short space of three years I have transformed this animalcule from a vegetable-consuming species to a carnivorous one."

"Impossible!" I exclaimed, thinking that some expression of wonder at his achievement was evidently expected of me. "Professor, you're a marvel!"

Professor Boyd-Phulger reddened like a young girl at her first compliment.

"You see, everything was in my favor," he explained diffidently. "My success is not so surprizing when you consider the extreme rapidity with which they increase and the simplicity of their bodily structure. They have no highly specialized organs

needing to become adapted, as have other animals higher in the scale. To such a pitch of perfection have I brought them"—he fingered the jar containing the loathsome stuff almost lovingly as he held it up for my inspection—"that they will assimilate almost anything in the way of animal food. But you shall see for yourself."

Disregarding my hasty assurance that I would be only too pleased to accept his word on the subject, he directed me to apply my eye to the instrument while, with a pair of delicate forceps, he placed an infinitesimal scrap of meat on the observation slide.

"Now observe what happens," he said, with the air of a conjurer performing his star trick.

For a while it seemed as if nothing were going to happen. The shapeless outline of the ameba remained inert and motionless, and near its outer edge I could see the smaller, pinkish speck which represented the meal the professor had so kindly provided for its enjoyment. But it did not seem as if the giddy little animalcule felt peckish that afternoon. I was just on the point of venturing a remark to that effect, when I began to notice a slight movement in the thing. Then, so slowly that at first the motion could scarcely be detected, but with ever-increasing speed, a slender feeler-like mass took form and slid out from the side nearest the morsel of food. With a kind of horrible, blind purposefulness it encircled its meal, the creature's body moving forward as it did so; until at last it had entirely enveloped it. For a time I could see the speck of meat through the semi-transparent, jelly-like substance of its body; then it rapidly grew fainter, fading away like a lump of sugar in a tumbler of water, until finally it disappeared altogether.

"The food has been assimilated," explained Professor Boyd-Phulger. "In a moment the organism will divide in two. That is how these protozoa multiply—by simple fission."

Even as he spoke, a cleft appeared across the body of the ameba—if one may use such a term in respect of a thing which might be equally correctly described as being all body or possessing none at all—and presently it completely divided.

Boyd-Phulger laughed as he noted the astonishment pictured on my features.

"That process will go on indefinitely," he told me, "and it invariably takes place more rapidly after the organism has eaten. You can see for yourself that, in place of the single ameba there are now two. One can hardly call them mother and daughter, for the terms could be interchanged with the same amount of truth. Those two will divide into four, the four into eight, the eight into sixteen; until—provided a plentiful supply of animal food be procurable—you will have the thousand splitting into two thousand, the million into two million, and so on indefinitely. I assure you that the rapidity with which they increase is little short of marvelous. They are the simplest, the most primitive, and the most prolific organism on this globe. And they are immortal——"

"Immortal?" I echoed, staring.

"Inasmuch as they never die," asserted the professor solemnly. "They merely divide, each half continuing to live until it in turn divides. There is for them no death as we know it. It really seems as if these lowly creatures, alone of all the myriads of varieties of created life, continue to put off forever the payment of the debt of nature."

I stared again at the two motionless gray specks. I was bewildered and only half credulous. How could it be possible for living matter to go on living, feeding, multiplying forever? The professor must have

sensed my skepticism, for he continued eagerly:

"I assure you that what I state is correct. The contents of these jars"—he reached up and took one off the row of shelves as he spoke—"are destined to live forever. Although each individual is, of course, indistinguishable by the naked eye, there are literally millions of amebas within this jar."

I took the jar in my hand and gazed at the contents, fascinated almost in spite of myself. Then a sudden thought struck me.

"Here, I say," I remarked, "if what you've told me is correct—about them being fond of animal food, and increasing so quickly, you know—then it would be jolly awkward if——"

"Harold," interrupted Mavis' voice from the other side of the door, "are you ready to play that set you promised?"

"Rather!" I cried eagerly. "Please excuse me, Professor."

I hastily handed the glass jar back to him—so hastily, indeed, that it slipped through his fingers and smashed into fragments on the tiled floor.

"I'm awfully sorry," I said. "I suppose I've killed all your little animalcules." And, like a fool, I went down on my hands and knees to scrape the filthy things up.

"Oh, they are not so easy to kill," laughed the professor easily. "But you need not worry about them. I have plenty more—and they increase like wildfire."

Later on I had good reason to know that he spoke the truth!

NIGHT was already beginning to fall when I quitted the professor's house to return home—a night heavy, hot, and windless, with a threat of approaching rain in the low-lying clouds to the north.

But I was in no mood to criticize the weather. Between the time of my accident in the laboratory and my departure I had found opportunity to put the greatest question of all to Mavis—and her answer had certainly not been in the negative. I trod on air as I turned off the main road and struck into the narrower one which runs athwart the crest of Shooters Hill, on whose summit the professor's house stands. Half-way along I came to a halt and, leaning over a low fence stretching between two of the villas which line the road, lighted a cigarette. The ground here stands extremely high, and the prospect below lay spread almost maplike before me. Beyond the jumble of houses which covers the lower slopes of the hill on this side lay the denser mass of roofs, topped here and there by some spire or clock-tower, marking the site of the busy town of Woolwich. Directly ahead, the rays of the rising moon silvered the streak of the distant Thames as it showed here and there in its winding course. Beyond that again, the serried rows of masts and funnels spoke of the crowded docks on the northern shore.

Lights began to appear from the street-lamps and houses below as I stood smoking and musing over the events of the day. Although I, as an accepted lover, should have been in the seventh heaven of delight, I was conscious of a feeling of gloomy apprehension. Try as I might, I could not shake off the recollection of what I had viewed through that confounded microscope. There had been something so horribly repulsive in that slow, emotionless, yet remorseless seeking of food by those "educated" amebas, that I found myself involuntarily shuddering at the thought of it. Could it be possible that Professor Boyd-Phulger was right, and this thing, without brain, stomach, nerves, or even heart, was in reality the first beginning of all known life?

And as I mused thus, I recalled to mind the remark of the professor when I had smashed the jar: "They

are not so easy to kill . . . and they increase like wildfire. . . ."

The words were still ringing through my brain when at last I turned to resume my homeward journey; but little did I dream of the seeds of widespread death and destruction which were even at that moment hatching at their fell maturity within the house I had just quitted.

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I did not go near the professor's house for a week after that night. When I explain that Mavis was also absent on a visit to relatives in Scotland, the intelligent reader may perceive cause and effect in the two circumstances. Consequently it was not until the morning of the seventh day that I became aware that anything was amiss. The professor himself brought the news. He burst in upon me unannounced as I sat at my solitary breakfast. Knowing his usual punctiliousness in matters of dress, I stared open-mouthed at the figure he presented. He had not shaved that morning; his tie was awry and his vest half-buttoned; his frock coat and trousers were smeared with dried mud. But it was the look of frozen horror on his ashen features which struck me dumb with a sense of impending calamity.

For a moment we remained staring at each other. Then, with something like a dry sob in his throat, he lurched forward and fell into the chair I pushed toward him.

"A terrible thing has happened," he gasped. "Those amebas—you remember the jar you smashed?—they have increased enormously — the grounds are swarming with them—I can do nothing! And——" He broke off abruptly in his almost incoherent explanation, shuddered, and sank his head upon his arms, too overcome to continue.

"Yes, yes!—go on. What else?" I prompted, fearing I know not what.

"They—they've commenced to eat things!" he answered with a kind of dull helplessness.

"*Things?* What kind of things?"

"Living things: chickens—the dog in the next house—and—my God! Harold—there's a child missing from next door but one! They haven't seen it since yesterday evening. They do not suspect the truth as yet, but I'm morally certain those cursed amebas have got it—would to heaven I had never set eyes on the things! It's terrible!—terrible!"

I could distinctly feel the hair rising at the back of my scalp. "You really mean to say that slimy stuff has devoured a child?" I asked.

A travesty of a smile twisted his trembling lips. "They've proved my theory, all right; they've accustomed themselves to their environment fast enough. They're adaptable—oh yes! —infernally, fiendishly adaptable!" And he gave vent to peal after peal of shrill, mirthless laughter.

I quickly crossed to the sideboard and poured out a stiff glass of the only restorative I had handy. He appeared calmer after I had persuaded him to drink it off, and a little color began to steal into his ashen face. Then, by dint of much questioning, I got the account of what had happened.

It seems that he had not attached the slightest importance to the smashing of the jar containing the amebas; he had allowed the fragments, with their slimy contents still adhering, to lie there until his man-servant had swept them up and deposited them in the dust-bin with the other rubbish. During the following days he had been busily engaged on the monograph which was to announce his discovery to the world. To the liberated amebas he never gave a single thought.

"I simply forgot all about them, Harold," he explained with an almost pathetic simplicity. "Even when Timson came to me with tales about the mysterious demise of his chickens,

I did not suspect the truth. I went to bed that night without the slightest misgiving. I arose early, and, happening to glance from my window, I saw what appeared to be a heavy frost on the stone edging of the lake and the lawns which adjoin. A moment's reflection, however, convinced me that this could not be the explanation of the strange, grayish-white hue which covered everything. At the same moment I perceived that the ground itself seemed to be in motion. It was a slow, steady, billowing movement, slight but unmistakable—something like the flowing of the tide upon a river. As I looked the horrible truth burst upon me! It was my amebas increased and multiplied beyond measure!

"Instantly I connected their augmented numbers with the fate of the chickens and the dog next door, and hard upon this discovery came the full realization of the gravity of the matter. Now that these things were loose, given sufficient moisture and food—and you know how much rain we have had lately—there would be no saying where they would end. They must be destroyed immediately. But how?

"My heart sank as I looked at the slowly moving, slimy mass—there must have been millions upon millions of the creatures there. They had enjoyed a week of unrestricted freedom, remember; and you have seen with your own eyes how rapidly the things increase. Clearly I must act at once if I were to avert the consequences of my folly.

"I dressed, throwing on my clothes anyhow; then I descended to the margin of the lake. Such was the state of consternation into which my unexpected discovery had thrown me, that I did not even realize the personal danger I courted in placing myself within reach of that teeming horde of hungry organisms. It was not until—following that unerring instinct to move toward animal food which the things possess—a stream of them was approaching to cut off my retreat, that I saw my peril. I fled, and at once determined to come to you for your advice and help.

"But there was another shock awaiting me. The first person I encountered on emerging from my front gate was the maid from the house two doors away. She was about to call on me to inquire if I had seen anything of their little girl, who had not been seen since she went out in the garden to play the previous evening. I suppose I must have mumbled some reply to her question—heaven alone knows what I said!—then I pushed past her and hurried off. The girl was still staring after me when I looked back from the corner of the road. I am positive she must have suspected something. You must come back with me, Harold, at once. If those things get beyond my grounds there is no saying what mischief they will do!"

It was only with the greatest difficulty that I persuaded the agitated man to swallow a little breakfast; after which we at once set out for Shooters Hill. Before leaving, however, an instinctive desire to take some weapon assailed me. I accordingly made my way to my bedroom, loaded an old revolver I happened to possess, and slipped it into the side pocket of my coat; though exactly of what use that would have been against a swarm of microscopic creatures was not quite clear in my mind.

The wild fears to which my mind had been a prey during the journey began to abate as we drew near the professor's house. Everything seemed as usual. It was still early in the morning; there had been rain overnight, and the newly burst foliage showed up fresh and green in the bright spring sunshine. Below, somewhere in the marshy woods to the right, a thrush was warbling as though in answer to the clear notes of a lark in the cloudless blue above.

Except for the songs of these feathered minstrels a deep and peaceful quiet reigned.

The house also appeared unchanged; not a trace of the gray slime could I detect either on the well-kept lawns or graveled pathways. The professor must have guessed the unspoken suspicion in my mind as I looked toward him.

"No, it was not a delusion," he assured me hastily. "The stuff was there all right; the question is—where is it now? The amebas have a great partiality for water, and I confess I am surprized that they should have quitted the vicinity of the lake. I wonder if it is possible——" He broke off short and pointed excitedly. "Yes! Look there!"

A narrow, but deep, ditch ran along the edge of the woods, and from it, barely discernible against the darker gray of the roadway, there overflowed a dully glistening stream which I knew could be nothing else but the dreaded slime. In itself the thing did not appear very alarming; in fact, from where we stood it might have passed entirely unnoticed were it not for the luster of its surface where it reflected the rays of the sun. Yet it covered the road from side to side and stretched downhill as far as the eye could reach.

The professor drew in his breath sharply.

"There it is," he said. "Luckily there is not much traffic so early in the day, otherwise——"

As he spoke we heard the sound of a motor ascending the opposite side of Shooters Hill. It must have been traveling at considerable speed, in spite of the steepness of the incline, for it came into sight over the crest almost immediately—a big green limousine resplendent with glittering fittings and immaculate enamel.

"We must stop them!" Boyd-Phulger cried, suddenly awakening to action. The next moment we were both standing in the track of the oncoming car with arms outstretched. It came to a standstill with grinding brakes, and a bloated, black-bearded face appeared at the near-side window.

"Vat 'sh matter, Morry?" the face inquired, addressing the driver in an accent certainly not acquired in these islands. "Vat 'sh stopping for?"

Professor Boyd-Phulger came forward, gesticulating vaguely.

"You can not go on," he cried. "It's not safe."

"Vat d'ye mean—not safe?" demanded the man at the window.

"Why, I've been down this hill hundreds of times," put in the liveried chauffeur with a grin. "It's as safe as houses!"

"But not now," the professor answered. "I assure you it is dangerous now."

The driver turned from regarding us and looked down the hill. "It's a clear road," he declared.

The professor shook his head. "It is far from being a clear road," he said gravely. At the same time he stepped nearer and laid his hand on the handle of the door.

"What's the matter with it, anyway?"

"There is death on it!"

"*Vot's* on it?" The passenger was palpably startled—as well he might be.

"Death!" repeated Professor Boyd-Phulger solemnly.

There was a pause in the conversation after this. Then another voice was heard, coming from the interior of the car.

"I'm surprized at you vasting time listening to a drunken cadger like 'im," came in thick, but unmistakably feminine accents. "Don't yer know ve're late already?"

The professor recoiled a pace and his face changed.

"You think I am drunk?" he asked very slowly.

The face at the window grinned. "Eider dat or mad."

I think it must have been at this moment that the professor realized for the first time the figure he was cutting; unshaven, dirty and disheveled, with his muddy frock-coat flapping in the wind. I thought it high time to intervene.

"It's quite true." I came forward as I spoke. "You can not possibly proceed."

The man's fat-encircled eyes narrowed to two suspicious slits. "You'd better be careful, young feller," he shouted truculently. "Dere's a police-station at der bottom of the hill."

"But you'll never live to reach it if you attempt to go on!" interrupted the professor, and his words must have sounded like a threat in the other's ears.

"A hold-up, eh?" He drew back from the window as he rapped the words out. "Ve'll soon see about that!"

"For heaven's sake be advised——" I began; then my voice died away in dismay. In pulling out my handkerchief to wipe the moisture from my forehead I had inadvertently caught my finger in the trigger-guard of the revolver, with the result that the luckless weapon came clattering out on the roadway in full view of everybody.

"Drive over der scoundrels, Morry!" came the terrified roar to the driver, and I must admit that the man made a zealous effort to obey.

The near wheel missed me by inches as I sprang back when the car jerked into motion. The next instant it was swooping downhill as swiftly as its unbraked wheels could carry it.

"I tried to stop them—I did my best—didn't I, Harold?" wailed the professor, wringing his hands in hopeless despair. Then he suddenly fell silent, and together, like men entranced by some grim tragedy on the stage, we watched the progress of the rapidly dwindling car.

From our station on the brow of the hill we could see every detail of the scene which ensued. Swiftly and noiselessly as a swooping bird, the limousine drew nearer to the fatal stretch of roadway. At the last minute something of his previous cocksureness must have evaporated from the driver's mind. No sooner had he crossed the margin of the slime than he applied his brakes suddenly. The car swerved, and then stopped. At such a distance it appeared to us no larger than a toy; the driver, as he alighted to ascertain what was amiss, looked like a tiny shadowgraph figure outlined against the shining background. We saw him stoop, and finally kneel down by the rear wheel. The next instant he was on his feet again, slipping, staggering, waving his arms wildly as though he battled with unseen foes.

Presently he was down again, this time full-length. Again and again he rose from that slimy mass, and after each fall it seemed to my excited imagination that the man was literally disappearing before our eyes, though it was probably merely the accumulating layer of slime on his uniform that made it appear so. Slower and slower grew his movements, until at last he fell and rose no more. At the same moment the other occupants emerged from the interior of the car. . . .

I averted my eyes. I had seen enough. When I took courage to look again the road appeared to be empty. Except for the derelict car at the foot of the hill the whole thing might have seemed but a ghastly nightmare.

A trembling grip upon my arm recalled me to myself.

"Quick!—pull yourself together!" cried the professor. "You must get downhill and warn the town before the slime reaches it."

"Downhill?" I repeated dully. "*There?*" I shook my head impatiently, for it seemed as if he were sending me to certain death.

"Not by that road," he explained quickly. "There are other ways of

reaching Woolwich. You must 'phone the Home Office from the first public call-box you pass. Then make your way to London and explain personally to the authorities. For myself, I must return to my laboratory."

"That may be dangerous," I objected. "If any of the slime is still remaining there——" I completed the sentence with a significant shrug.

But the professor was not to be deterred. "I have brought this menace into existence, and it is my duty to find some means of destroying it; otherwise the stuff will depopulate London."

"Barriers could be erected——" I began.

"Barriers?" cried Boyd-Phulger with a snort of contempt. "These organisms are capable of ascending a perfectly perpendicular surface. No mere mechanical means will prevent their progress toward the food they covet. But we are wasting precious time. Get to your task of warning the metropolis, and I will get to mine. Good-bye!"

Then he turned and left me without another word.

3

The result of my endeavors to warn the authorities of the threatened peril may be summed up in two words: utter failure. First of all I called at Scotland Yard and told my story; but all they did was to read me a long lecture on the by-law which deals with straying farm stock.

". . . and of course all ferocious animals have to be under proper control whilst on the public highway," the official wound up gravely. "You'll be liable for any damage done by these here—what-d'ye-call-'em—hambones?"

"Amebas," I corrected.

He scratched his head with the handle of his pen. "Never heard of sech things," he confessed. "How many of them have got loose?"

"Oh, a few hundred millions," I answered wearily.

The man regarded me fixedly for a full minute. "How big are they?" he then asked.

"You would need a strong microscope to distinguish each one——" I commenced to explain, but he cut me short by rising suddenly to his feet.

"That's enough!" he told me sternly. "You'll find yourself in the wrong shop if you try to play your practical jokes here!"

Then he ordered me out and called a constable to accelerate my departure.

Though I fared no better at the Home Office, the clerk there was more tactful in his incredulity. At any rate he condescended to take my name and address before dismissing me with what was evidently his stock phrase.

"Your communication will be attended to in due course," he assured me blandly. "Good-morning."

As a last desperate resort I tried the newspaper offices—and narrowly escaped being arrested as a wandering lunatic. Weary and disheartened, I resolved to return to Shooters Hill.

I bought an early edition of an evening paper in Cannon Street Station, and scanned its pages eagerly during the journey down. The fact that there was no mention of the appearance of the slime raised my hopes considerably, though I could see that the brief account of the "Motor Fatality on Shooters Hill" referred to the tragedy I had witnessed that morning. But the moment I alighted at Woolwich Arsenal Station I noticed signs that something unusual was afoot. There was a knot of khaki-clad infantrymen lounging about the door of the waiting-room, whilst one of their number, in full equipment down to steel helmet and gas mask, marched up and down the platform with fixed bayonet.

It seemed that gun-fire had been heard during the afternoon, coming

from the direction of the Common, and everybody was talking about the cordon which the military had drawn round Shooters Hill, diverting all traffic, including the tram and motor services. My cautious inquiries went to show that the general public had no suspicion of the real state of affairs.

"Manoovers—that's what it is," declared one man with whom I entered into conversation. "The sojers have been marchin' about and firin' all the arternoon. I heard 'em meself. Foolishness I calls it—sending all the traffic miles out o' their way a busy day like this. Just red tape and foolishness."

Further inquiry on my part elicited the fact that it was no unusual occurrence for the military to perform their evolutions on the stretch of common which abuts on Shooters Hill; consequently the firing and warlike preparations had occasioned no alarm.

On quitting the station, I found the usual Saturday market to be in full swing in the adjoining Beresford Square. Turning to the right, I walked up the hill between the barracks until I came to the picket which held the road. For a while I chatted with the sergeant in charge; but he either could not, or would not, give me any inkling of what was going on.

"Road stopped, sir; C. O.'s orders," was all I could get out of him; so, mainly to distract my thoughts, I retraced my steps to the crowded market-square; afterward wandering into the side streets where old clothes, eatables, cheap drapery and mock jewelry were being noisily vended. At one corner a quack doctor was holding forth the merits of his highly colored cure-all; at another, a Salvation Army band added its music to the clamor.

It was while I was listening to the witticisms of a raucous-voiced cheapjack that I became aware of the sound of rapidly approaching hoof-beats. The next moment a party of cavalrymen came galloping down Wellington Street, shouting their loudest as they rode:

"Clear out! Get out of the way!" they were crying. "The slime!—the slime is coming! The slime!"

Those in the crowd stared at them uncomprehendingly.

"Wot's the trouble nah?" asked a man near me.

"Blimy! is it anuvver war?" ventured another.

"The slime!—the slime is coming!"

Uselessly the soldiers repeated the words as they forced a passage with their horses through the crowd. As they came nearer I saw that each man wore his gas mask in position. This puzzled me at the time, for it was only later that I learned of the futile attempt that had been made earlier in the evening to destroy the advancing swarm by means of poison gas. The soldiers passed out of sight in the direction of Plumstead Road, still repeating their monotonous slogan, and in the path they had made I forced my way through the press until I reached a spot where I could obtain an uninterrupted view of the direction whence they had come. This was a long, straight, inclined thoroughfare stretching up toward Woolwich Common and the barracks, forming one of the main streets of the town.

For a time I could see nothing unusual; then, as I continued to look, I noticed the people on the pavements turning and gazing up the hill.

A woman at my side suddenly addressed me. "Wot's up, guvnor?" she whimpered. " 'Ave they all gone barmy? Wot wiv——"

A hoarse murmur of apprehension from a thousand throats broke in upon her words. A yard-high tide of gray had come into sight on top of the hill and was creeping downward toward the densely packed crowd below. The murmur swelled louder and ever louder; cries and shrill screams began to mingle with it. On the hill before

us people were running—slipping—falling. . . .

"Run! run!—all of you!" I shouted to those around me, and tried with hurried words to make them understand their danger. But for all the attention they paid I might just as well have saved my breath. For ten precious minutes I wasted my warnings on the air, and all the while the sea of slime rolled down toward us. Not until it had passed the Hippodrome did I bethink myself of my own safety. Then I turned to the right and ran in the direction of the Free Ferry Pier, intending to lose no time in putting the width of the river between myself and that deadly, creeping mass.

Well it was for me that I acted in time. I was barely half-way along Powis Street when a long-sustained crying arose from the direction of the square I had just quitted. Commencing with a low wail, it rose abruptly to a shrill crescendo of mortal fear, punctuated every now and again by a sharp staccato rattle of rifle shots, the whole forming such a harmony of horror as I trust never to hear again. The sounds died away as I halted to listen, only to be replaced by the thunder of many approaching feet. Trapped on three sides, the mob in the square had taken its only avenue of escape and was even then pouring down the street which lay parallel to the one I was in. I again began to run, reaching the ferry approach in time to mingle with the vanguard of the fleeing mob as it swerved round from the right, evidently making for the same means of safety as myself.

This being a Saturday night, two boats were running. One, already filled with its usual complement of foot-passengers and vehicles, was waiting at the pier with steam up, ready to cast off in time to pass her sister-ship in midstream. As I raced across the gangway I could see the captain on the bridge staring in surprize at the crowd running toward his boat.

"What the blazes is the matter?" he called to me as I passed.

"The slime! Death!" was all I could pant out; for I was almost breathless.

"What?" he yelled back, and repeated his question as the ever-increasing crowd began to throng across the gangways. But the only answer he received must have served only to make his bewilderment greater:

"The slime! the slime! Cast off! Hurry!" they shouted, "The slime!—the slime is coming!"

Now I am very loth to seem to cast an imputation on the conduct of a man who is no longer able to defend himself; yet I can not help thinking that the captain of the ferry fell into a grave error of judgment in not casting off immediately. Even granting that the frenzied cries of the crowd were meaningless to him, their obvious terror—to say nothing of the rifle-fire—should have warned him of the urgent need for haste. In spite of this, it was not until the foremost wave of the pursuing slime had actually reached the pier, and had commenced to pour down the broad gangways on the upper deck which admit the vehicular traffic, that he awoke to a full realization of the peril.

"Cast off all!" he bawled suddenly. "Cast off, I tell you!"

At the same time he jammed the engine-room telegraph over to "Full speed ahead."

But the men who should have been standing by the hawsers were no longer at their posts. The huge paddle-wheels began to churn the dun-colored waters to a creamy froth; the hawsers strained and groaned; but the heavy, broad-beamed vessel remained immovably fastened to the pier.

The trickling rivulets of slime had become a broad, fast-flowing stream, which, having covered the upper deck,

me dripped and splashed on the deck below. Shrieks began to mingle with the hoarse orders and the grinding of the engines. . . .

At this I hesitated no longer. If I must die, I preferred a cleaner and more merciful fate than that which awaited me on that boat. Not a score of yards away was a string of moored barges. I ran forward to the bow—in order to be as far as possible from the seething maelstrom set up by the revolving paddles—sprang upon the grating, and plunged head foremost into the river.

Striking out with all my might under the surface, I rose well clear of the deadly suction, and in a few minutes had reached the nearest barge and clambered aboard. Then I dashed the water from my eyes and looked back at the ferry-boat.

One of the mooring warps had already been cast off, or severed, for her stern swung well clear of the jetty. Beside the lower gangway, a man—a laborer by his clothes—was sawing at the forward hawser with a jack-knife. The strands began to part even as I looked. Then the weakened rope gave way with a report like a cannon-shot, and the ferry, under the impulse of her powerful paddles, shot out into the river, steering erratically and rending the air with long, frightened blasts from her siren.

The slime had accomplished its work only too well; it was clear that the vessel was completely out of control. Alarmed, and probably not a little puzzled, at the extraordinary evolutions of her consort, the other ferry-boat had approached in order, it seemed, to render assistance, and now lay about a cable's length away, with her paddles slowly flapping to keep her in position against the strongly running tide. Straight toward it the other vessel was driving at full speed! A collision seemed inevitable; yet the steersman must have retained some glimmering of consciousness still. At the last minute the helm was swung hard over to port and the ship veered round, rushing past the other's stern with only a few feet of clear water showing between. But it must have been the last expiring effort of the man at the wheel. Instead of straightening out on her course again, the boat continued to swerve in response to her ported helm; until, having described a complete circle with undiminished speed, she crashed into the other ship's broadside, just abaft the paddle-box.

The heavy bluff bow seemed to cut through sponson and plating like a knife through cheese. In a few seconds the rammed ship had a list so great that the vehicles on the upper deck came rushing down the incline, to plunge, one after another, through the bulwarks into the water beneath. Presently she turned completely over, wrenching herself free from her destroyer as she did so, and the roar of her exploding boilers preceded the final plunge.

Then the other ship, apparently undamaged and with engines still slowly revolving, described yet another stately circle, until, her progress growing slower and ever slower by reason of the diminishing head of steam in the unstoked boilers, she finally came to rest with her horrible cargo near the wharf belonging to the Beckton Gas Works.

In such tragic fashion was the slime transferred to the north bank of the Thames.

4

I THINK it must have been somepurely subconscious instinct that directed my footsteps homeward, for of my movements immediately after the destruction of the ferry I retain only a vague and confused memory. I have a dim recollection of having rowed ashore to some steps near the Dockyard, in a dingey which I found moored to the barge, and I remember seeing the advancing slime not a hundred yards off as I crossed the

Lower Woolwich Road. But what route I pursued between that point and my house at Eltham I have not the faintest idea.

Certain it is that I must have tramped throughout the whole night, for the east was already gray with the dawn when I found myself seated at my upstairs window, gazing dully out at the country around. It was not until the pangs of hunger asserted themselves that I arose to seek food, and a strange assortment it was that I at last collected: half a loaf of stale bread, a tin of pineapple, and a bottle of ale. As I sat down at the table I realized with a start that I had not broken my fast since that hurried meal with Professor Boyd-Phulger, in that same room, twenty-four hours earlier. Twenty-four hours!—I seemed to have lived through an eternity of horror since he had brought the news to me. I wondered what was happening now. Had the progress of the slime been checked, or was it even now pouring through the streets of London?

Moved by a sudden thought, I left my meal half eaten and, crossing to the radio set, connected up the batteries. The first words which issued from the loud-speaker were part of the personal proclamation by King George ordering the immediate and systematic evacuation of the capital.

It would be superfluous for me to give the full text of that amazing speech; sufficient to say that I listened to each word with a sense of incredulous bewilderment. The idea of the largest, wealthiest, and most populous city in the world being abandoned to the very lowest form of organic life seemed utterly fantastic. Yet, even then, I could not but admire the prudence and foresight with which every detail had been thought out and every contingency provided for. Section by section, beginning with those districts nearest the slime, the inhabitants were to lock up and leave their houses and shops. Every motor vehicle within the Greater London area was to be requisitioned to convey them, street by street, parish by parish, to the various railway termini, where special trains would be waiting ready to leave at once for the great camps and improvised billets which were being prepared in the Midlands and North of England. Squadrons of military airplanes were to be dispatched at once to rescue those unfortunate families who had already been hemmed in by the advancing gray tide. General mobilization was ordered. Heavy artillery, tanks, gas, liquid fire—in short, all the resources of modern warfare—were to be brought into play to destroy the deadly menace. Calmness and orderly conduct were enjoined upon all. Ex-service men were appealed to that they might enrol themselves in the new emergency battalions which were being formed to assist the police and military in their twofold task of destroying the slime and preserving order. All coming forward were to receive rations and infantry pay. Looting would be punished by death.

Three times I heard this epochal speech repeated, each time on a different wave-length. Shortly after the conclusion of the third repetition I heard the well-known voice of Professor Boyd-Phulger issue from the instrument before me.

"Boyd-Phulger calling! Hullo! Hullo everybody — anybody! Professor Boyd-Phulger calling from Shooters Hill!"

It was the merest ghost of a whisper, but it thrilled me like a trumpet-call. My hands were shaking with excitement as I turned the knobs to tune in to the wave-length on which he and I were accustomed to communicate. Little did we dream, when we had fitted up those sets as a mere spare-time hobby, what desperate issues would one day hang upon them!

"Hullo!" I shouted into the microphone when I had made the adjustment. "It is I—Harold—calling."

Something that sounded like a sigh of relief floated back from the ether. "Thank heaven, I have got you at last! I've been trying to make you hear, off and on, all through the night."

"Where are you speaking from?" I queried.

"The laboratory at my house. The place is surrounded by the slime. I am entirely cut off. My batteries are running down—I can't get London at all, and there's not much time to waste——"

"Yes, yes—go on," I urged in an agony of apprehension as the voice faltered.

"I've barricaded the place and stopped all crevices as well as I was able, but the stuff is finding ways to enter in spite of my efforts. It can only be a question of time now. I know it is impossible for me to escape, but I have been experimenting continuously since I parted from you, and I have made a discovery which will save London yet. You must take my message and try to communicate with headquarters. If you succeed it will mean the entire destruction of the terrible scourge I have brought upon humanity. . . ."

His voice had tailed off weakly and finally ceased altogether. I shouted frantic appeals into the microphone for several minutes before he spoke again:

"I was forced to leave the instrument"—his voice was but a husky whisper—"the slime has found entrance to this room. Ah! . . ."

A deadly fear gripped my heart as the voice again ceased.

"But your discovery?" I cried. "Tell me of the discovery which will destroy the slime."

He could not have understood my question, for he went on aimlessly: "By the sounds which have reached me I surmise that the military have been shelling the stuff with high explosives. Such a proceeding is worse than useless. Without actually killing the organisms, it will but serve to spread them over a wider area in which to increase and multiply. It is impossible to kill them by ordinary methods; even if you cut them in pieces you but hasten their natural increase by fission. Nothing but the combination of chemicals that I discovered last night will exterminate them utterly."

Ever since the professor had first commenced to speak I had been conscious of an increasing weakness in his voice. Had the slime, I wondered, already begun its deadly work on him? I waited in an agony of impatience. Would he carry to the grave, untold, the secret that would save humanity?

"Tell me the formula of the antidote," I called to him. "Tell me at once—before it is too late."

I waited his answer breathlessly. Twice an indistinct murmur issued from the loud-speaker, as though the man essayed to speak but could not. Then in a gasping, jerky whisper came the words:

"They've got me, Harold! . . . I'm done for! . . . Tell—the authorities—the formula to—destroy the slime—is——"

"Yes?" I prompted.

But the only reply was an unintelligible babble of words and moans; and when these died away there came a noise like that made by a falling body; then a deep silence which no entreaty of mine could break.

5

EXACTLY how long elapsed between the death of the professor and the coming of Mavis I have never been able to determine. The event had plunged me into a stupor almost as complete as that which follows a violent physical blow; so that seconds, minutes and hours might have passed alike unheeded.

So humanity was doomed! Such was the tenor of my vague and confused thoughts. The victorious ame-

bas, invigorated and augmented in numbers by the death of each fresh victim, would sweep unchecked over London, a flood of destruction as remorseless as it was irresistible, as deadly as it was unkillable. And after London—what then? What guarantee was there that the slime would not continue on its way, eating up village after village, town after town, city after city, from one end of the kingdom to the other? And who could say that the mischief would end even then? Only twenty-one miles separate the coasts of England and France; and it seemed as if the amebas were as much at home in water as on land. They might dominate Europe — perhaps the whole world.

There is nothing new or strange in the fact of whole species of highly specialized mammals being entirely wiped off the face of the earth. The study of paleontology brings to light thousands of instances where such forms have, in past ages, become utterly extinct; indeed, so much so that we are only aware that they ever existed by the fossilized bones which have been occasionally dug up. Could it be possible, I mused, that the mighty, ever-changing cycle of nature was at that moment nearing the end of another revolution? Was man—the highest and most advanced type of life upon the earth—about to be in his turn supplanted by another form, and that the very humblest of known organisms—nay, the primitive ooze from which all life had been slowly evolved during those countless ages that stretch between the present day and that far-off, unknown period, when the cooling earth was first rendered habitable to organic life? The very thought was overwhelming. And yet, why should it not be true? Virtually every form of life has had its day and then perished utterly and completely. That was the law of nature. Why should mankind be an exception to the rule?

I was aroused from these pessimistic meditations by the sound of a motor-car drawing up before the front garden gate, followed immediately afterward by a ring at the bell. Throwing open the door, I found myself, to my unbounded amazement, face to face with Mavis.

"You?" I almost shouted. "I thought you safe in Scotland. Why have you ventured here?"

"I read about the slime in the papers, and returned this morning. I tried to get to Shooters Hill, but the roads are impassable. So I made my way here, hoping to find my uncle with you."

It is a strange fact that her presence brought home to me something which I should have realized long before: namely, the great danger I courted in remaining so near the area occupied by the slime.

"How far were you able to get toward Shooters Hill?" I asked quickly.

"Not beyond that bend in the road," she answered, pointing to a curve about three hundred yards distant.

So near? I felt my blood run cold at the imminence of the peril.

"There is no time to lose," I told her. "We must get to London at once. There we can get a train which will carry us far from all danger."

"But—my uncle?" she cried. "Is he not here with you?"

I shook my head and averted my eyes. "He is beyond the reach of the slime." I could not summon up courage to tell her the truth. "Do not worry about him, but come before it is too late."

Fearing further questions, I gently took her hand and led her down the hall toward the front door. Suddenly I stopped dead and a groan of despair broke from my lips.

Stretching between ourselves and the waiting car was a broad stream of heaving gray, which, following the contour of the ground, had already

joined another stream coming from the rear of the house, cutting off our retreat. We were trapped!

It was a mere instinctive action with which I shut and locked the door. It was futile to hope that such a barrier would be effective against that all-pervading, living sea. The instincts of the animalcules would lead them to worm their way through crevices, scale perpendicular surfaces, anything, in fact, to gain access to the food they coveted, which —my blood froze at the thought—in this case meant my own living body and that of the woman I loved!

In a few hurried sentences I explained the peril in which we stood. Her face grew white as death, but there was no tremor in her voice as she asked: "Then it is the end?"

"Yes." I hardly recognized the sound of my own voice.

"There is no hope whatever?" she went on.

I pointed to the film of gray that was beginning to obscure the lower window-panes. "In two hours, at the most, all will be over."

Beyond nodding her head slightly she made no sign that she had heard.

Death. . . . Would it come like the closing of a tiny door, or as the opening of a far greater one? For a long time I strove to keep my mind from contemplation of the manner in which the end would come; yet, in spite of my resolution, my eyes would return to the slight, graceful figure opposite me. The thought of that foul, creeping slime enveloping those fair limbs almost goaded me to frenzy. I leaped to my feet.

"No, by heaven!" I cried aloud. "Any way but that!"

Even as I said the words I was conscious of a sagging weight at my hip. It was the revolver. Half mechanically I drew it out, and our eyes met above the glittering barrel. There was no need for words on my part.

"Yes," she said slowly, answering the question in my eyes. "Kiss me. Then shoot me dead."

And as she spoke a slender stream of gray entered beneath the door.

I raised the weapon until it touched the sunny curls, and then closed my eyes. With an unspoken prayer for forgiveness in my heart, I pulled the trigger.

I dared not look upon my handiwork. My eyes were still closed tightly as I raised the weapon to my own temple.

Simultaneously with the crash of the explosion came blessed oblivion. . . .

"FEELING better?" asked a voice near me.

I slowly opened my eyes. Above me, looking blurred and indistinct, hovered the face of Professor Boyd-Phulger. For a while I gazed stupidly; then recollection rushed upon me. I staggered unsteadily to my feet as the explanation of his presence dawned slowly on my mind.

"Of course—you, too, are dead."

"Dead?" he repeated, blinking behind his glasses. Then he stepped forward and forced me back into the chair. The grip of his hand on my shoulder seemed a trifle too heavy for that of a disembodied spirit.

"Where am I?" I asked faintly.

"In my laboratory. I was just about to ascertain the extent to which the amebas were susceptible to anesthesia when you happened to catch a whiff of the nitrous oxide. It sent you off to bye-bye as peacefully as an infant in its mother's arms."

I placed my hand to my throbbing head. Was it possible that my horrible experience was but a drugged nightmare?

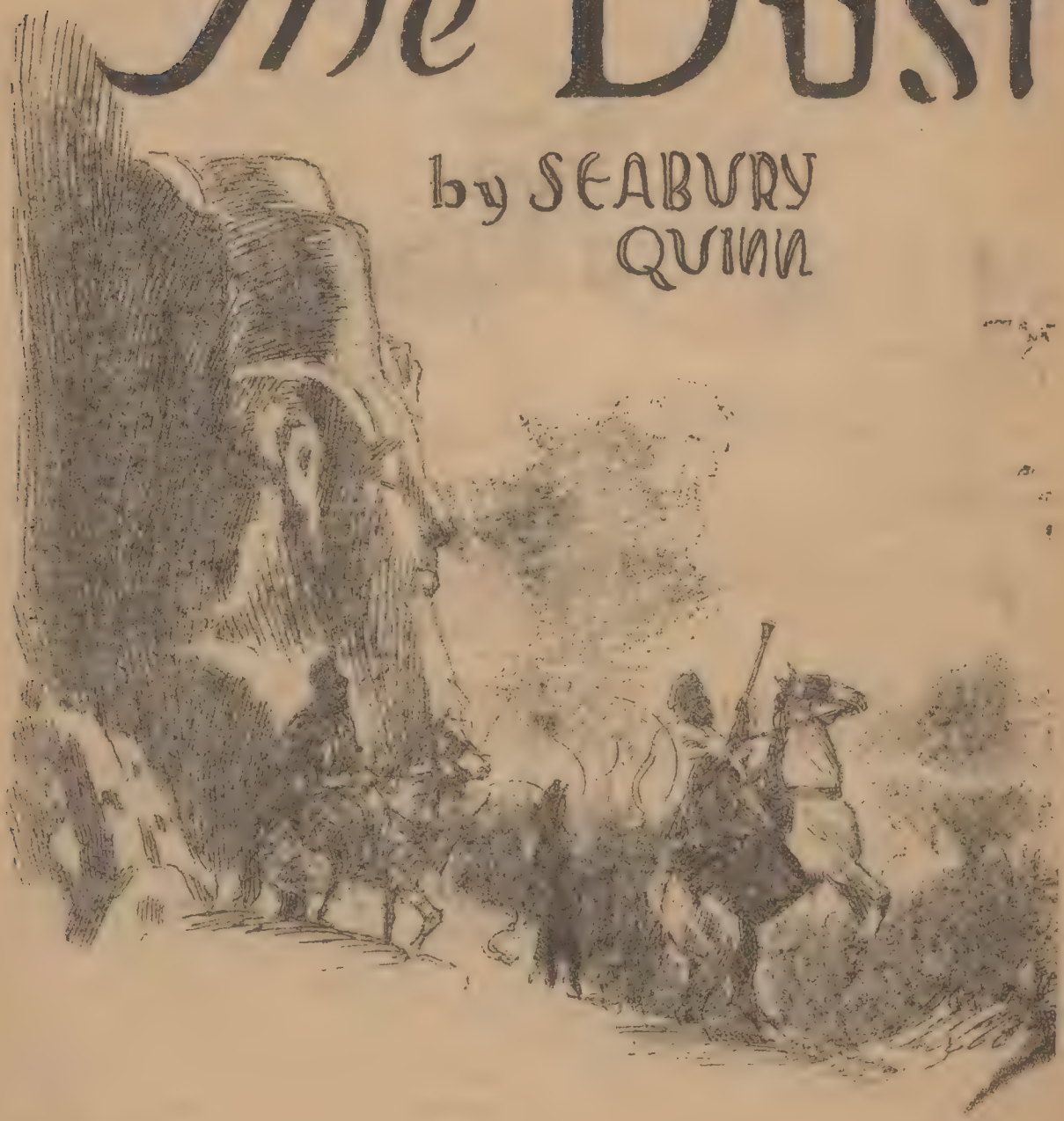
"Tell me," I said suddenly, "how long have I been unconscious?"

Professor Boyd-Phulger glanced at his watch.

"Exactly eight minutes," he said.

The Dust

by SEABURY QUINN



IT WAS an odd couple Nora McGinnis ushered into my drawing-room that snowy February night. The man was good-looking, extraordinarily so, with fine, regular features crowned by a mass of dark hair, broad forehead and deep, greenish-hazel eyes set well apart beneath brows of almost startling blackness. His chest was deep and well developed, and his wide, square shoulders told of strength and stamina beyond the usual. Yet he was scarcely more than five feet tall, and the trousers of his well-tailored dinner suit hung baggily on limbs shriveled to mere skeletal proportions. His right knee bent awkwardly at a fixed, unchanging angle which made his walk little more than a lurching,

# of Egypt

"Men who had fought with Grant and Sherman and Farragut weren't the kind to be stopped by unorganized Arabs."

painful hobble, and the patent leather oxfords on his feet were almost boyish in their smallness. Obviously, poliomyelitis had ravaged his once splendid body hideously, leaving a man half perfect, half pitiable wreck.

The woman, apparently almost of an age with her companion—somewhere near twenty-five, I judged—was in everything but deformity his perfect feminine counterpart. Close as a skullcap of black satin her mannishly shingled, jetty hair lay against her small, well-shaped head; her features were so small and regular as to be almost insignificant by reason of their very symmetry; her walk was one of those smooth, undulant gaits which announce a nervous balance and muscular co-ordination not often found in this neurotic age. A sleeveless evening frock of black net and satin fell in graceful folds almost to her narrow, high-arched insteps, and

the tiny emerald buttons decorating her black-satin pumps were matched by the emerald studs set in the lobes of her small ears and, oddly, by the greenish lights in her black-fringed hazel eyes. She was devoid of make-up, save the vivid scarlet of her lips.

I examined the two small oblongs of cardboard Nora had handed me before admitting the visitors. "Mr. Monteith?" I asked tentatively.

"I am he," the young man answered with a quick smile which lighted his somber, brooding countenance with a peculiar charm, "and this is my sister, Louella." He paused a moment, as though embarrassed, then:

"We've been told you have a friend, a Dr. de Grandin, who occasionally interests himself in matters which have, or seem to have, a supernatural aspect. If you would be good enough to tell us how we might get in touch with him——"

"*Avec beaucoup de félicité!*" Jules de Grandin interrupted with a laugh. "Stretch forth your hand, and touch, *mon ami;* I am he whom you seek!"

"Ah?" young Monteith stared at the little Frenchman, scarcely knowing how to acknowledge the unusual introduction. "Ah——"

"*Précisément,*" de Grandin assented as he waved the callers to a seat upon the fireside lounge. "We are very well met, I think; this had promised to be a dull evening. Now, regarding this seemingly so supernatural matter concerning which you would consult Jules de Grandin——" he raised his narrow, black brows till they described twin Saracenic arches and paused expectantly.

Young Monteith ran his hand over his smoothly brushed black hair and directed a look almost of appeal at the little Frenchman. "I hardly know how to begin," he confessed, then cast a puzzled glance about the room, as though seeking inspiration from the Dresden figurines on the mantelpiece.

"Why not at the beginning?" de Grandin suggested pleasantly as he drew out his slim gold cigarette case, courteously proffered it to the visitors, then held his pocket lighter for them to set the tobacco alight.

"The case concerns my uncle—our uncle's—death," Mr. Monteith replied as he expelled a cloud of fragrant gray smoke from his nostrils. "It may have been natural enough—the death certificate read heart failure, and there were no legal complications—but both my sister and I are puzzled, and if you can spare the time to investigate it, we'd—here," he broke off, drawing a thin packet of papers from his inside pocket, "this is a copy of Uncle Absalom's will; we might as well start with it as anything."

The little Frenchman took the sheets of foolscap with their authenticating red seals and held them to the light.

"In the Name of God, Amen," he read: "I, Absalom Barnstable"—Barn-stable, *mon Dieu*, what a name!—"being of sound and disposing mind and memory and in full bodily vigor, yet being certain of the near approach of unescapable and inevitable doom, do hereby make, publish and declare this, my last will and testament, hereby revoking any and all other will or wills by me at any time heretofore made.

"First—I commend my spirit to the keeping of God my Savior, and my body to be buried in my plot in Vale Cemetery.

"Second——"

"You can skip the second, third and fourth paragraphs," Mr. Monteith interrupted; "the fifth is the only one bearing further on our problem."

"Very well," de Grandin turned the page and continued: "Fifth—And it is my will and desire that my said nephew and niece, David and Louella Monteith, aforesaid, do take up residence in my house near Harrisonville, New Jersey, as soon as they shall be

apprised of the provisions hereof, and shall there remain in residence for the full term of six months, and at the end of that time, *unless intervening occurrences shall have prompted them to take such action earlier,* or unless it shall have become physically impossible so to do, they shall remove from the said house the mummy of the Priest Sepa and see it safely transported overseas and buried in the sands of the Egyptian desert; and I do especially make the faithful carrying-out of these injunctions conditions precedent to their succession to the residuum of my estate."

De Grandin finished reading and glanced from the brother to the sister with his odd, unwinking stare.

"We are the residuary legatees of Uncle Absalom's estate," David Monteith explained. "It amounts to something like $300,000."

"*Parbleu,* for half that sum I should undertake the interment of all the shriveled mummies in the necropolis of Thebes!" the Frenchman returned. "But where is the *outré* feature of your case, my friends? True, your estimable uncle seems to have been peculiar, but eccentricity is the privilege of age and wealth. Why should you not make yourselves comfortable in his late dwelling for half a year, then bury the so long dead Egyptian gentleman with fitting honors and thereafter enjoy yourselves in any manner seeming good to you?"

It was the girl who answered. "Dr. de Grandin," she asked in a charmingly modulated contralto voice, "didn't you notice the odd phraseology in the opening paragraph of Uncle Absalom's will? If he had said 'being certain of the near approach of unescapable and inevitable *death*' we should have paid little attention to it, for he was past eighty years old, and even though he seemed strong and active as a man of sixty, death couldn't have been so far away in the natural course of things; but he didn't say 'death', he said 'unescapable and inevitable *doom*'."

"*Exactement,*" de Grandin agreed calmly, but the sudden light which shone in his little round blue eyes betrayed awaking interest. "*Précisément, Mademoiselle;* what then?"

"I'm certain that horrible old mummy he mentions in his will had something to do with it," she shot back in a low, almost breathless voice. "Show him the transcription, David," she ordered, turning to her brother.

Mr. Monteith produced a second paper from his pocket. "Louella found this in an old escritoire in the library the day before Uncle Absalom died," he explained. "She meant to ask him about it, but never got the chance. It may shed some light on the case—to you. It only makes it more mysterious to us."

"Transcription of the Tablet found in the Tomb of Sepa the Priest," de Grandin read:

"Sepa, servant and priest of Aset, the All-Mother, Who Is and Was and Is to Be, to whoso looks hereon, greeting and admonition:

"Impious stranger, who hast defiled the sanctuary of my sepulcher, be thou accursed. Be thy uprisings and thy down-lyings accursed; accursed be thy goings-out and thy returnings; cursed be thou in labor and in rest; may thy nights be filled with terrifying visions and thy days with travail and with pain, and may the wrath of Aset, who Was and Is and Is to Be, be on thee and on thy house for all time. May thy body be the prey to kites and jackals and thy soul endure the torture of the Gods. Unburied shalt thou die, and bodiless and accursed shalt thou wander in Amenti forever and forever, and be this malediction on thee and on thy house until such time as my relics be once again interred in the sands of Khem. I have said."

"*Eh bien,* he cursed a vicious curse, this one," the Frenchman re-

marked as he concluded. "And what is this we have here?"

Pasted to the bottom of the sheet bearing the translation of the old priest's curse was a newspaper cutting bearing a London dateline:

London, Nov. 16.—The strange death of Richard Bethell, son of Lord Westbury, today revived the legend of the curse of death that hovers over those who disturb the graves of the ancient lords of Egypt.

His death is the tenth among the leaders of Lord Carnarvon's expedition to the Valley of the Kings in Egypt, which uncovered the tomb of King Tutankhamen.

Bethell, who was secretary to Howard Carter, leader of the expedition, was found dead in bed in the aristocratic Bath Club. Physicians are at a loss as to what caused his end.

"U'M?" de Grandin put the paper down and regarded the visitors once more with his direct, level stare. "And what of your late uncle?" he demanded. "Tell me what you can of his life; more particularly of his death."

Again it was the girl who answered. "Uncle Absalom was educated for the Unitarian ministry," she began, "but he never accepted the vocation. About the time he was to take up his ministerial work he met a young lady in New Bedford, Massachusetts, and fell violently in love with her. Yankee clippers still traded with the Orient and Near East in those days, and Miss Goodrich's father, who was a ship-owner, offered Uncle Absalom a share in the business if he would give up his clerical career. He shipped as supercargo on the *Polly Hatton* at his future father-in-law's suggestion, and in the course of a three-year cruise touched at Alexandria, Egypt.

"He seems to have had plenty of time to go inland exploring, for he made a trip up the Nile and with a party of Arabs broke into a tomb somewhere near Luxor and brought back several mummies, some papyri and some funerary statues. It was comparatively easy to get such things out of Egypt in those days, so Uncle had little difficulty in bringing his finds—or would you call them loot?—away. Oddly enough, they proved the foundation of his fortune.

"Unknown to Uncle Absalom and the master of the ship, Mr. Goodrich had died of smallpox while the *Polly Hatton* was on her cruise, and when they came to appraise his estate he was found to be practically bankrupt. Harriet, his daughter, married a wealthy young ship-chandler, and was the mother of two children when her 'fiancé' finally returned to New Bedford.

"But the mummies Uncle Absalom had found proved rather valuable ones. Egyptology was just beginning to be the important science it is today, and the papyri found in the mummy-cases gave a great deal of valuable information the officials of the British Museum had only guessed at before. They paid Uncle £200—a great deal of money in those days—for his finds, and made him a liberal offer for any further antiquities he might bring them.

"When Uncle Absalom returned to New England to find his expected bride already a wife and mother, his entire nature seemed to change almost overnight. The quiet, bookish divinity student was transformed into a desperate adventurer. The Civil War had been over five years, and the country was beginning to drift into the period of hard times which ended in the panic of 1873. Plenty of young men who'd served in the Union army and navy were out of work, and Uncle Absalom had no trouble recruiting a company of followers without respect either for danger or decency, provided there was money to be had for their work.

"Poor Uncle Absalom! I'm afraid everything he did during the next twenty years or so wouldn't bear too close scrutiny! The returns from his first venture in grave robbery had

proved so good that he went into it as a business.

"Even though most of them were Mohammedans and didn't believe in the old gods, the Egyptians didn't take kindly to foreigners despoiling the ancient tombs, and Uncle and his men encountered resistance more than once; but the men who had fought with Grant and Sherman and Farragut weren't the kind to be stopped by unorganized Arabs, or even by the newly organized gendarmerie of Egypt. They robbed and plundered systematically, taking their loot to a sort of buccaneers' cache they'd established at a desert oasis, and when they'd accumulated enough spoil to make it worth while, they'd take it out in an armed caravan, sometimes striking for the Red Sea, sometimes going boldly to the Mediterranean, and wo betide whoever tried to stop them!

"Of course, both the English and the French went through the motions of combatting this wholesale grave-robbery, but both countries had more important things to attend to, and Uncle's men helped them subdue rebellious natives more than once; so many of his crimes were winked at officially. Also, the great museums of London, Paris, Berlin and St. Petersburg were glad to buy whatever he had for sale, and often bid against each other for his wares; so he grew rich and, in a way, respected. The curators of those museums weren't so very different from people over here," she added with a smile. "When I was in school in Washington it was common gossip that the Senators and Congressmen who championed prohibition most eloquently in the halls of Congress were the bootleggers' best customers in private life.

"What had started as a purely commercial enterprise with the additional element of adventure to help him forget the way he had been jilted at length became a real passion with Uncle Absalom. He learned to decipher the Egyptian hieroglyphics, for he'd been a first-rate Greek scholar in college and Boussard's discovery of the Rosetta Stone in 1799 had furnished the key to the old written language, you know. Long before he retired from his dangerous profession Uncle was rated as one of the foremost authorities on both ancient and modern Egypt, and two universities and the British government made him handsome offers for his services when he finally gave up tomb-robbing as a vocation.

"On his retirement he made a number of gifts to the Egyptian departments of the museums which had been his best customers, but the cream of his finds he retained for his private collection and kept them in his house near Harrisonville.

"I don't suppose you ever even heard of him, Dr. Trowbridge?" she turned her odd, rather melancholy smile on me. "He's lived just outside town for almost ten years, but when we came to visit him the taxi-driver had never heard of 'Journey's End', where he lived, and we had a great deal of trouble finding him. You see, he had hardly been outside his own grounds once since settling here, and most of his things, including staple groceries, he bought from a mail order house in Chicago. I don't believe half a dozen people in the whole city knew him, or even knew of him.

"David and I came to visit him last month in response to an urgent invitation. He intimated he intended making us his heirs, and as we're orphans and were his only living relatives, it seemed no more than human charity to accede to his request.

"He was a wonderful-looking old man, courteous, gentle and very learned. He did everything possible to make us welcome, and we should have been very happy at 'Journey's End' if it hadn't been for an air of —well—uncanniness, which seemed to permeate the whole place. Somehow,

both David and I seemed to feel alien presences there. We'd be reading in the library, or sitting at table, or, perhaps, just going about our affairs in the house, when suddenly we'd have that strange, eery feeling of someone staring fixedly at the backs of our heads. When we'd turn suddenly—as we always did at first—there'd be no one there, of course; but the feeling was always there, and instead of wearing off it became stronger and stronger. Since Uncle's death I've noticed it more than David has, though.

"Uncle Absalom never mentioned it, and, of course, neither did we—except to each other—but I'm sure he felt it too, for there was a furtive, almost fearful, look in his eyes all the time, and the queer, haunted expression seemed to grow on him, just during the little time of our visit. It was only ten days before his death when he made his will, and you remember how he speaks of 'unescapable and inevitable *doom*'—instead of 'death'—in the opening paragraph.

"Now, I realize all this is not enough to excuse our belief in anything supernatural being involved in Uncle Absalom's death; that is, not enough to convince a disinterested third party who hadn't felt the queer, terrifying atmosphere of 'Journey's End' and seen the look of hopeless fear grow into an expression of almost resignation in Uncle Absalom's face," she admitted, "and I'm not sure you'll see anything so very unusual in what occurred the night he died. David will have to tell you about that; curiously enough, though everyone else in the house was awake, I slept through it all, and have no first-hand knowledge of anything."

"I compliment you, *Mademoiselle,*" de Grandin declared with one of his characteristically courteous bows. "You tell your story most exceedingly well. Already I am convinced. I shall most gladly undertake the case.

"Now, young *Monsieur,*" he addressed the crippled boy, "add what you can to the so graphic narrative *Mademoiselle* your sister has detailed. I listen; I am all attention."

DAVID MONTEITH took up the story. "Uncle Absalom died shortly after New Year's—the ninth of January, to be exact," he began. "He and Louella had gone to bed about ten o'clock, but I stayed up in the library reading. It's—pardon the personal reference—it's rather difficult for me to dress and undress, and sometimes I sit up rather late, just to defer the trouble of going to bed. So——"

"It hurts him," his sister interrupted, her eyes welling with tears. "Sometimes he suffers terribly, and——"

"Louella, dear, don't!" the boy cut in. "As I was saying, gentlemen, I sat up late that night, and fell asleep over my book. I woke with a start and found the night, which had been clear and sharp earlier, had become stormy and bitter cold. A perfect gale was blowing, and soft, clinging snowflakes were being dashed against the window-panes with such force that they struck the glass with an audible impact.

"Just what wakened me I can't say with certainty. I thought at first it was the shrieking of the wind, but, looking back, I'm not so sure; for, blending with the recollection of the dream I'd been having when I woke, was a sound, or combination of sounds——"

"*Mille pardons, Monsieur,* but what of this dream?" de Grandin interrupted. "Such stuff as dreams are made on are oftentimes of greatest importance in cases like this."

"Why," David Monteith colored slightly, "it was a silly hodgepodge I'd been dreaming, sir; it couldn't possibly have any bearing on what happened later. I dreamed I heard two people, a man and a woman, come up the stairs from Uncle Absalom's museum, which was on the

ground floor, and pass the library on their way to Uncle's room. And in the absurd way dreams have of making things appear, I thought I could look right through the solid wall and see them, the way you do in those illusional scenes they sometimes have in the theater. They were both dressed in ancient Egyptian costume, and were speaking together in some outlandish language. I'd been reading Munzinger's *Ostafrikanische Studien* when I fell asleep; I expect that accounts for the dream."

"U'm; possibly," de Grandin conceded. "What then, if you please?"

"Well, as I said, when I woke I thought I heard a sort of soft, but very clear, chiming sound, something like sleigh-bells heard a long way off, yet different, somehow, and with it what I took to be a woman's voice singing softly.

"I leaned back in my chair, half asleep still, wondering if some dream-image hadn't carried over into my semi-consciousness, when there came a new sound, totally unlike the others.

"It was my Uncle Absalom's voice, not very loud, but terribly earnest, arguing with, or pleading with someone. Gradually, as I sat there listening, his words became louder, he almost shouted, then broke off with a sort of scream which seemed to die half uttered, as though his mouth had suddenly been stopped or his throat grasped in a strangling hold.

"I lifted myself out of my chair and hurried toward the upper story as well as I could, but the stairway leading to the third floor was some twenty feet down the corridor and the stairs were steep and winding; so, with my handicap, I couldn't make very good time.

"While I was still half climbing, half crawling up the stairs, I heard a woman's scream, 'Howly Mither, 'tis th' banshee!' and recognized Maggie Gourlay, my uncle's cook and housekeeper. She and her husband, Tom, were his only servants, and shared all the household duties between them.

"When I finally reached the landing above, Maggie stood at the far end of the hall, her teeth fairly chattering, her eyes bulging with terror.

" 'Ouch, Misther David, 'tis all over wid Misther Absalom, God rist 'im!' she hailed me as I came up. ' 'Tis meself just seen th' banshee woman lave 'is room. Don't go nigh, Misther David; she may be waitin' fer others o' th' family.'

" 'Nonsense,' I panted. 'Didn't you hear my uncle call? Come here; we must see what he wants.'

"Wurra, wurra, 'tis nothin' but a praste an' an undertaker he'll be nadin' now, sor!' she answered, without coming a step nearer.

"I couldn't wait for the superstitious old fool to get over her hysteria, for my uncle might be seriously ill, I thought; so I rapped sharply on his door, then, receiving no answer, pushed my way into his room.

"Uncle Absalom lay on his bed, the covers thrown back, one foot hanging just off the floor, as though he had been in the act of rising. His arms were folded over his breast, his fingers locked together, clasping a pillow tightly against his chest and face.

"I switched on the light and removed the pillow; then I knew. I'd never seen a newly dead man before, but I needed no one to tell me my uncle was dead. I think we recognize death instinctively, just as a child recognizes and hates a snake without having been told reptiles are deadly. My uncle's jaw had sagged and his tongue had fallen forward and outward, as though he were making an inane grimace, and there was a bright, transparent film over his still opened eyes.

"I turned back his pajama jacket to feel his heart, and then it was I noticed the mark. It was just to the

right of his left breast, a sort of deep purple, like a discolored bruise or a St. Andrew's birthmark, less than an inch high, and faintly raised, like the wale left by a whiplash. Here"—the young man leaned forward, took a slender gold pencil from his pocket and drew a design on the margin of his uncle's will—"it was like this:"

"*Mordieu,* do you say it?" de Grandin exclaimed in a low, tense voice. "*Barbe d'un singe, c'est le plus étrange!*"

"Something else I noticed, though at the time it made little impression on me," Monteith continued: "There was a distinct odor of spice or incense—almost the odor you find in a Catholic church after services—in the room. It wasn't till considerably later, when I began rearranging my recollections, that I recalled it.

"Once I'd made sure Uncle Absalom was dead, Maggie and Tom seemed to have no more fear. They came into the room, helped me arrange his body, then assisted me down the hall to find Louella. She'd slept through it all, and I had to hammer on her door to waken her."

"You, *Monsieur?*" de Grandin asked. "Did not the servants knock?"

"Why"—the young man seemed to catch his breath as sudden recollection struck him—"why no; they didn't.

"D'ye know, Dr. de Grandin," he leaned toward the little Frenchman in his earnestness, "I believe they kept behind me purposely. At the time I thought nothing of it, but since you asked me about who knocked on Louella's door, I distinctly remember Tom held me under one arm and Maggie under the other, but both walked a little behind me, and both stood back when we halted at my sister's room."

"U'm?" de Grandin murmured. "And then what, if you please?"

"When Louella finally woke and let us in, she seemed so sleepy I had to shake her to make her understand what had happened. At first she just looked uncomprehendingly at me and kept repeating whatever I said to her in a dreamy, singsong voice."

"U'm?" de Grandin murmured again. "And——"

"By George, yes! Now I think of it, there was that same scent of incense in her room, too. I'm positive it wasn't in the hall or anywhere else; just in Uncle's room and hers."

"*Tiens,* at any rate, it was the odor of sanctity you smelled," the Frenchman returned with a chuckle. "Now, concerning this so strange mark you found upon *Monsieur* your uncle's breast. Was it——"

"I was coming to that," Monteith interrupted. "As soon as we could, we got in touch with the nearest physician, Dr. Canby. He came about an hour later, examined Uncle Absalom's body, and gave a certificate of death by heart failure.

"I asked him about the mark and wanted to know if, in his opinion, it had any significance. He just looked at me and asked, 'What mark?'

"We argued about it for a while, and both of us lost our tempers a little, I think. Finally, distasteful as it was, I went into Uncle's room, unbuttoned his sleeping-jacket and pointed to his breast."

"Yes, and then?" de Grandin demanded, leaning toward the narrator, his little eyes fairly aglow with anticipation.

"Nothing," Monteith returned in dull, anticlimactic voice. "There was nothing there. The mark had disappeared."

"*A-a-ah?*" de Grandin let his breath out slowly between his teeth as he leaned back in his chair.

"But, Dave, are you *sure* you saw that mark on Uncle's flesh?" the girl asked gently. "In the excitement and the poor light, mightn't you have imagined——"

"No," the young man answered positively. "I'm certain it was there when I found Uncle Absalom, and just as certain it had disappeared when I looked the second time."

"*Mais oui, Mademoiselle,*" de Grandin put in. "*Monsieur* your brother is undoubtlessly right. This business, it promises interest. Dr. Trowbridge and I shall do ourselves the honor of calling on you tomorrow or as soon thereafter as may be."

WE SAT long before the fire after David and Louella Monteith had gone. The Frenchman smoked cigarette after cigarette in moody silence, staring at the leaping flames in the fireplace as fixedly as a crystal-gazer seeking inspiration from his globe. At length:

"Friend Trowbridge, it is most remarkable, is it not?" he demanded abruptly.

"What?" I answered.

"That sign, that stigma on Monsieur the Grave-Robber's breast."

"Why, yes," I agreed. "It is odd it should have showed a few moments after death, then disappeared. I wonder, after all, if the girl was right. Young David *might* have imagined it, and——"

"*Non,*" he cut in. "The disappearance is the least mystifying phenomenon of all. It is of its form I speak. Did not you recognize it?"

"Why, no. It looked something like the conventionalized outline of a boot to me, but——"

"Ah bah," he exclaimed, "that sign, my friend, was the ideograph standing for the Goddess Aset, or, as she is better known to us, Isis, whom the Egyptians of old knew as the All-Mother. She Who Was and Is and Is to Be. It was she whom the priest Sepa, who so violently cursed the despoilers of his tomb, served, you will remember."

"Well——"

"Exactly, precisely, quite so; I damn think we shall see interesting things before he have done with this matter, my friend."

Early next morning he set off to visit the old priest in charge of the local Greek Orthodox Church. I stopped by the rectory something after four o'clock in the afternoon, and together we set out to visit the Monteiths.

2

"JOURNEY'S END," the quaint old Georgian house where Absalom Barnstable had spent the closing uneventful decade of his adventurous life and finally met mysterious death, was three stories high, flat-roofed, not particularly beautiful, and unexpectedly comfortable. Built of time-mellowed red brick with slightly discolored facings of white stone, it stood a dozen yards or so back from the Albemarle Pike, in the sparsely settled country lying ten miles east of Harrisonville. An iron railing, ornamented with faces, javelins and twining garlands, after the fashion of the late eighties, divided the front yard from the road, and on each side of the door, which was approached by three white-stone steps, grew a small privet tree neatly clipped and trimmed into a pyramid of dull, rich green.

The entire ground floor, with the exception of kitchen, pantry and furnace room, was given over to a museum for housing the late owner's antiquities. Partitions separating the big, high-ceiled rooms had been knocked out, and the major part of the story made into one great storehouse of curios—brightly painted mummy-cases, glass-fronted cabinets containing bits of ancient *vertu,* and tall, mahogany wardrobes, each furnished with secure locks, storing such relics as were not for open display.

The second story contained a large, old-fashioned formal drawing-room, a library with walls lined from baseboard to molding with book-laden shelves, and an open fireplace of almost baronial proportions, a dining-room vast as a banquet hall, and two guest-bedrooms, each with private bath. Sleeping-quarters for the family and servants and two large lumber rooms occupied the top floor.

Old Tom Gourlay, butler and majordomo of the establishment, met us at the gate and helped us with our luggage when we arrived at the house shortly before six in the evening. Behind him, in the lower entrance-way, waited his wife, Maggie, looking very demure in her black bombazine dress and white apron, but an expression of lurking suspicion—a certain grimness about her lips and hardness in her eyes—made me glance sharply at her a second time as we followed her husband up the wide stairway to the library where our host and hostess waited.

The Frenchman noted the woman's odd air of constraint, too, for he whispered as we ascended, "She will bear watching, that one, Friend Trowbridge."

Dinner was served shortly after our arrival, and despite de Grandin's efforts at small talk the meal proved a gloomy one, for we caught ourselves looking furtively at each other from under lowered lids, and though the old butler maintained his air of well-bred, stoical calm, on more than one occasion I caught a glimpse of Maggie Gourlay standing at the serving-pantry door, her queer, hard gaze fixed intently on Louella Monteith's sleek, bowed head.

Shortly after coffee had been served in the library de Grandin excused himself and, motioning me to accompany him, stole silently down the stairs. "The surest defense lies in attack, my friend," he explained as he led the way toward the kitchen. Then, as we entered the big, steamy room without preliminary knock, he demanded:

"Tell me, my friends, what was it you observed the night your unfortunate employer met his end?"

The servants started as though he had flung an accusation at them. Old Tom opened his lips, licked them lightly with the tip of his tongue, then closed them again and averted his eyes, like a sullen schoolboy chided by his teacher.

Not so his wife. An angry, challenging light shone in her Celtic blue eyes as she answered: "Why don't ye ask *her* about it, sor? She'll be better able ter tell ye than Tom or me, good Christians that we be."

"*Dites*," de Grandin pursed his lips, "is it an accusation that you make, my old one?"

"I'm making no accusations, an' I'm sayin' nothin' agin nobody," the woman returned sullenly, "leastwise, not widin hearin' distance of ears as miss nothin'. See here, sor"—she softened, as women always did when Jules de Grandin regarded them with that elfish, provocative smile of his—"ye're from th' other side; have ye ever been to Ireland—do ye know annything o' her fairy lore?"

"Ah-ho," de Grandin let his breath out with a half-chuckle, "the winds blows that way, *hein?* Yes, my excellent one, I have been to your so beautiful island, and I know much of her traditions. What is it you have seen which reminds you of the old sod?"

The woman hesitated, casting a half-defiant, half-fearful glance at the ceiling above her; then, confidentially: "What sort o' folk is it as can't call a name three times runnin' or eat three helpin's o' food at wan meal, or drink three sups o' drink?" she demanded with a sort of subdued ferocity.

The Frenchman met her earnest, searching stare with a level, unwinking look. "Fairy folk, and witches,

and ghosts of the departed who masquerade as living men," he answered glibly, as though reciting a lesson learned by rote. "Also those who have sold themselves to the Evil One, or they who have any manner of traffic with the Powers of Darkness——"

"True for ye, sor," she interrupted with a satisfied nod. "Ye're a gentleman, an' none o' these learned fools who laugh at th' old-time truths an' call 'em superstition. Then listen:

"When first they came here, th' crippled Misther David an' she who calls herself his sister, I wuz mightily afeared o' th' green eyes of her, an' of her pale, bloodless face an' her smilin' red lips, so thin an' cruel, wid th' white teeth flashin' so close behint 'em. So I sets a trap fer her. Whenever she wanted me, I pretended not to hear her call th' first time, nor th' second. Did she call twice? She did, sor. Did she call th' charmed third time? *Niver!*

"An', 'Tom,' sez I to me old man, 'do ye be watchin' how she eats an' drinks at table while ye're servin' th' dinners,' an' to make sure he wuzn't fooled be th' wicked, false beauty of her pale face, I climbs th' stairs an' watches her from th' servin'-panthry door meself. More than wanst I watched her, sor, but niver, as God an' th' blessed St. Patrick hear me spake, did I see her put th' third piece o' meat or bread in her mouth, nor did she ever take a third cup o' wine, though Tom at me express orders would fill her glass no more than half full, so she'd have all th' chanct a Christian woman needed ter ask for a third helpin' o' th' crater."

"U'm?" de Grandin tweaked the tightly waxed ends of his diminutive blond mustache. "And what else, if you please? The night your master died, by example——"

"Jest so, sor," she broke in eagerly. " 'Twas afther we'd heard old Misther Abs'lom cry out in mortal anguish an' whilst Misther Davy—poor lad!—wuz clumpin' an' clompin' up th' stairs from th' libr'y below, we seen it come out from his room. All scairt an' terror-shook as we wuz, I hollered out that 'twas th' banshee that walked th' house be night, but 'twarn't, sor. 'Twuz her—or *it*—sor, as howly St. Bridget hears me say it, 'twas her!

"Sure, an' I seen her come sneakin' from out his door, wid her cruel, red lips parted in a divil's laugh an' her terrible green eyes shootin' fire at me through th' dark, freezin' me where I stood.

"Down th' hall she went, sor, so quiet-like ye'd have swore she floated, for niver mortal woman stepped so softly, an' when she turned th' corner o' th' corridor, I knew we'd seen an evil thing that night; a witch-woman from Kylenagranagh Hill, arrayed in th' likeness o' pore Misther Abs'lom's blood-kin. Then it wuz me lips wuz loosened, an' I called aloud ter Misther Davy to beware—fer who knew but that she looked fer more o' th' masther's blood to destroy, havin' a'ready kilt th' old man dead wid her magic power?"

"I DECLARE, I'm so sleepy I can scarcely keep my eyelids up!" Louella Monteith told us a few minutes after we rejoined her and her brother in the library upstairs. "I've not stirred from the house today, but I haven't been so drowsy since——" she broke off abruptly, her eyes widening with something like horror.

"Yes, *Mademoiselle?*" de Grandin prompted softly.

"Since the night Uncle Absalom died," she answered. "I was terribly drowsy from right after dinner that evening, too, and slept like a log from the moment I went to bed—remember what trouble David had to

waken me when he and the servants came to my room, to tell me——"

"*Précisément,*" de Grandin agreed. "By all means, *Mademoiselle,* do not let us keep you from your needed rest. Dr. Trowbridge and I are here to help, not to make nuisances of ourselves."

"You won't mind?" she asked gratefully as she rose to leave. "Good-night, gentlemen; good-night, Davy, dear; don't sit up too late, please."

Midnight sounded on the tall clock in the hall; still we talked and smoked in the library. David Monteith was widely read and widely traveled, and his flow of conversation was as interesting as it was varied in subject-matter. We were discussing some comic idiosyncrasies of Parisian *concierges* and taxi-drivers when de Grandin halted the talk with upraised hand.

Quickly as a cat, and as silently, he stole to the door, motioning over his shoulder for me to shut off the library lights. A moment he stood silent in the doorway of the darkened room, then crept down the hall toward the stairs leading to the museum below.

Ten minutes or so later he rejoined us with a shamefaced smile. "Jules de Grandin grows old and nervous, I fear," he admitted with a humorous lift of his eyebrows. "He starts at shadows and hears ghostly footsteps in the creaking of old floor-boards. My friends, it is late. My vote is that we retire; do you agree?

"NON, my friend, it may not be," he denied as I prepared to disrobe shortly after we had bid our host good-night. "Remove the shoes, by all means; otherwise remain clothed. I fear we shall have small sleep this night."

"But," I protested, "I thought you were so sleepy. You said——"

"Assuredly," he agreed with a nod as he replaced his evening shoes with a pair of soft-soled slippers, "and the mother who would still her little one's fear declares she hears nothing when she is most certain she hears a burglar prying at the window-latch. Attend me, my friend:

"While you, Monsieur Monteith and I talked all pleasantly in the library I did descry the soft, so silent step of someone creeping down the stairs. At once I bid you shut off the light, that I might not stand out in silhouette against its glow and thus betray myself; then I did reconnoiter.

"All quietly down the stairway Mademoiselle Louella did steal, and to one of those great, fast-locked cabinets she went unerringly, though the museum was dark as Pluto's own subcellar.

"Today she told me she knew not where the keys of those locked cases were—that her late uncle had kept them in a secret place and that she knew it not—but with a key she did unlock that cabinet door, and though that key was one of many on a ring, she made no difficulty in finding it in the dark, or in fitting it to the lock. No.

"Anon she turned back, and on her arms and in her hands were many things; objects I could not certainly identify, but seeming to be articles of clothing and ornaments—grave-loot from the old ones' tombs, I doubt not, and worth a kingly ransom for their great antiquity, whatever their intrinsic worth might be."

"But why did you pretend you'd seen nothing?" I demanded. "Do you suspect——"

"I suspect nothing; I know nothing," he rejoined. "I declared my mission fruitless that the young *monsieur* might not have new perplexities added to those he already has. What sort of business Mademoiselle Louella makes—or purposes to make—I do not know. At any rate, her actions were most strange, and we shall be advised to sit with one eye and one ear fast-glued to our keyhole throughout the night."

3

WRAPPING myself in a dressing-gown, I dropped into one of the deep wing chairs flanking the bedroom fireplace and lighted a cigar.

Jules de Grandin paced the length of the chamber, lighted a cigarette and flung it aside after two or three puffs, drew something from the pocket of his lounge-robe and examined it, replaced it, finally seated himself on the extreme edge of the easy-chair across the hearth and seemed to freeze statue-still.

Once or twice I essayed a remark, but his quickly lifted hand cut me short each time. His attitude was one of intent listening for some expected sound, and I found myself thinking again how suggestive of a feline the little fellow was. With his round, blue eyes widened by the intentness of his attention, the sharp, needle-fine ends of his waxed mustache fairly quivering with nervous tautness and his delicate, narrow nostrils now and again expanding as though he would discover the presence of that for which he waited by virtue of his sense of smell, he was for all the world like a tensed, expectant, but infinitely patient tom-cat stationed at the entrance of a promising rathole.

Time crept by with weighted feet. I yawned, stretched myself, tossed away my cigar, and fell into a doze.

"Trowbridge, *mon vieux*, arouse!" de Grandin's sibilant whisper cut through my nap. "Awake, my friend—listen!"

In the room above us, the chamber where crippled David Monteith slept, there sounded the indistinct murmur of a voice—a woman's voice—and blending with it like a cunningly played accompaniment to a soloist's recitation was the faint, musical chiming of a bell. Yet it was not like any bell I had ever heard; rather it was like a staff of chimes with a single, tri-toned note, or a major note with two undertones pitched differently.

"Sounds like——" I began.

"*Zut!* Be quiet — come!" commanded Jules de Grandin.

Silently as a panther stalking through the jungle, he led the way into the corridor and up the stairs. Before the door of David's room he paused, raising his hand in an arresting, minatory gesture.

The voice behind the panels was that of Louella Monteith, yet strangely different from it; deeper, more reverberant than the girl's usual contralto. The words she spoke were in a language strange to me, but reminiscent, somehow, of such few phrases of Hebrew as I had learned when as a young hospital intern I'd ridden an ambulance through the crowded foreign sections of the city. And blending with the cold, passionless monotone of the woman's voice was a second one, a man's voice, quivering with passion, accusatory, low and vindictive as a serpent's hiss.

With a quick movement of his left hand de Grandin thrust the door back and advanced across the threshold. The tableau thus revealed struck me numb with blank amazement.

Although no light burned, the scene was clear-cut as though enacted in brilliant moonlight, for a silvery, radiant luminance without apparent source seemed to permeate the atmosphere of an Egyptian room.

Crouched on a couch, his eyes wide with grisly, unbelieving horror, was David Monteith. Kneeling on the drugget in an attitude half of adoration, half cringing servility, was a man clothed only in a loin-cloth. His shaven head accented his lean, cruel features. One of his long, bony hands was extended, pointing fiercely at young Monteith, and, it seemed to me, the pointed hand was like an aimed weapon, serving to direct the unabating flood of invective the kneeling creature hurled toward the man upon the bed.

But it was the woman that stood in regal, awful majesty in the midst of the moon-like effulgence who caught and riveted my attention. Louella Monteith it was, but a changed, transmuted version of the girl we knew. Upon her head was the crown of Isis—the vulture cap with beaten gold and blue-enamel wings and the vulture's head with gem-set eyes, above it two upright horns between which shone the red gold disk of the full moon, beneath them the uræus, emblem of Osiris.

About her neck lay a broad collar of hammered gold thick-set with emeralds and carnelian, and round her wrists were bands of gold and gleaming, blue enamel in which were studded emeralds and coral. Her bosom was bare, but high beneath her breasts was clasped a belt of blue and gold from which cascaded a diaphanous garment of web-fine linen gathered in scores of tiny, narrow pleats and fringed about the hem with a border of sparkling gems which hung an inch or less above the narrow, arching insteps of her white and tiny feet. In one hand she held a gold and crystal instrument fashioned like a T-cross with an elongated loop at its top, while in the other she bore a three-lashed golden scourge, the emblem of Egyptian royalty.

All this I noted in a sort of wondering daze, but it was the glaring, implacable eyes of her which held me rooted to the spot. Like the eyes of a tigress, or a leopardess, they were, and glowed with a horrid, inward light, as though illumined from behind by the phosphorescent luminance of an all-consuming, heatless flame.

Even as we halted spellbound she raised her golden scourge and aimed it at the man upon the bed, while the crouching thing at her feet gave vent to a wild, demoniac cachinnation—a triumphant laugh of hatred appeased and vengeance satisfied. A low, weak moan came from David Monteith, a groan of abysmal agony, as though his tortured soul were being ravished from his tormented flesh and tore his crippled body into tatters as it was dragged forth.

I started forward with a cry of horror, but Jules de Grandin was before me. "Accursed of God!" he shouted, and his voice was harsh and strident as a battle-cry. "Fallen foes of the Lord Jehovah; upstarts against the power of the Most High; *in nomine Domini, conjuro te, sceleratissime, abire ad tuum locum!* Hence, loathed remnants of a false and futile faith; in the name of Him who overcame ye, I command it!"

For a moment—or an eternity, I know not which—there was dead, frozen silence in that weirdly lighted room. Every actor in the drama stood sculptured-still, like a figure on a graven monument, and only the frantic pulsation of my heart sounded in my ears.

The Frenchman thrust his right hand into the pocket of his lounge-robe and brought forth something—a tiny golden reliquary, a little thing of gold and modest, purple amethyst so small a man might hide it in the hollow of his hand—and letting it slip through his fingers swung it by a slender golden chain, waving it slowly to and fro in the air as though it were a censer. "By the power of the one who cast ye out, O Aset, Aset of olden Egypt, by the memory of Cyrillus of Alexandria, I conjure ye," he chanted slowly. "Behold the thing which I have brought from out the Land of Khem, even that which the holy one of old upraised against ye and against your power; behold, and be afraid!" He swung the little golden cross ceremonially before him and advanced into the room.

The groveling man-shape cut short its horrid laughter, and with jaws still agape, half rose, half crawled across the floor, its lean and claw-like hands upraised as if to ward away some

stream of invincible power which flowed from out the bit of gold de Grandin held.

Jabbering half-formed words in an outlandish tongue, words I could not understand, but which were clearly an appeal, the thing retreated as de Grandin pursued inexorably.

I held my breath in horror, then almost screamed aloud as the Frenchman and his adversary reached the room's boundary, for the hunted creature *passed directly through the wall,* as though brick and mortar had no substance!

The little Frenchman turned from his quarry and approached the form of Isis, which seemed to stand irresolute beside the bed. Only, it was no longer a goddess we beheld, but a woman. True, she was still beautiful and queenly in her trappings of barbaric splendor, but the odd and moonlike light no longer shone around her, nor was there an aura of dread and fearsomeness about her, and the awful, glowing eyes which filled my soul with fear were now recognizable for what they were—the likeness of staring, vengeful eyes *drawn in luminous paint upon her lowered lids!*

"To your chamber, *Mademoiselle,* I command it!" de Grandin ordered in a low, authoritative voice. Then, to me:

"Look to Monsieur David, Friend Trowbridge. You will find him suffering from shock, but not greatly hurt otherwise, I think."

Quickly, I ministered to the fainting man upon the bed, forced water mixed with brandy down his throat, pressed a vial of sal volatile to his nostrils and bathed his wrists and temples. He rallied slightly, gasped once or twice, then lapsed into a heavy, natural sleep. When at last he lay quietly on his pillow I opened his pajama jacket to listen to his heart, and on the flesh of his left breast, faint, but still recognizable for what it was, lay a tiny, reddish stigma, thus:

I hurried to de Grandin to tell him of my find, and met him tiptoeing from Louella Monteith's room. "Softly, my friend," he warned with upraised finger; "she sleeps."

"WHERE'S David?" Louella Monteith asked as she joined de Grandin and me at breakfast the following morning. "He's usually an early riser—I hope he's not ill today?" She turned to ascend the stairs to her brother's chamber, but de Grandin put forth a detaining hand.

"Your brother had rather a trying night, *Mademoiselle,*" he said. "Dr. Trowbridge has given him an opiate; it will be some time before he wakes."

"Oh"—the concern in her eyes was very real—"don't tell me the poor boy's had another of his spells! He suffers so! Usually he calls me if he's ill in the night, and I do what I can to help him; but last night I didn't hear a thing. I slept so soundly, too. Do you——"

She brightened as a consoling thought seemed to come to her. "Of course," she smiled. "Why should he have called me when we had two physicians in the house? I'm sure you did everything possible for him, gentlemen."

"Precisely; we did, *Mademoiselle,*" Jules de Grandin returned non-committally as he gave his undivided attention to the well-filled plate of bacon and eggs before him.

"NO! I tell you; I'll never willingly look at that she-devil again, so long as I live!" David Montieth almost shouted in response to de

Grandin's suggestion. "Talk all you will of her being my sister; I tell you she's the vilest, most unholy thing unhanged. Oh God, why doesn't the law recognize witchcraft today? How I'd enjoy denouncing her, and seeing her tied to the stake!" He leaned back on his pillow, exhausted by the vehemence of his emotion, but his deep-set, greenish hazel eyes glowed with fury as he looked from one of us to the other. Then:

"She killed Uncle Absalom, too. I know it. Now I understand what old Maggie Gourlay meant when she warned me against the banshee. It was Louella—my sister! She killed our uncle, and she almost finished me last night. I tell you——"

"And *I* tell *you,* Monsieur David, that you talk like an uncommonly silly fool!" de Grandin broke in sharply. "Hear me, if you please—or if you do not please, for that matter. Attend me, listen, pay attention, forget your chuckle-headedness! You talk of witch-burning, and, *parbleu,* you do well to do so, for you assuredly show the shallow-emptiness of head which so characterized those old ones who sent innocent women to the flames!

"*Non,* listen to me," he bade sharply as the other would have spoken. "You will hear me through, if I must knock you senseless and bind you to the bed in order to keep you quiet!

"Your story of your uncle's death did greatly interest me when first you told it. That old Sepa, the Priest of Aset, or Isis, as we call her nowadays, had any personal part in it I did not seriously consider; but that the constant, continuous, subconscious *thought* of that old one's curse had much to do with it I was very certain. Consider, my friend, you know how half a dozen people, thinking together, can sometimes influence one in a company? You have seen it demonstrated? Good. So it was in this case, only more so; much more so. For generations the dwellers in Egypt bowed the knee to Aset, the All-Mother, she whom they worshiped as She Who Was and Is and Is to Be. Now, whether such a personality as hers ever existed or not is beside the question; let but enough persons loose thoughts of her, and they have created a thought-image of such strength that only *le bon Dieu* knows its limitations.

"So with the vengeance of the dead. For more generations than you have hairs upon your head the Egyptians believed implicitly that he who broke the rest of the entombed dead laid himself open to direst vengeance. And to strengthen this belief, those who were buried were wont to place a curse-stone in their tombs, denouncing the disturbers of their long rest in such language as old Sepa directed against your late uncle. Yes, it is so.

"Your late lamented kinsman spent much time among the ancient tombs. It was inevitable he should have absorbed some sort of half-agnostic belief in the potency of the old ones' curses. That sort of thing grows on one.

"Anon, having retired, he sets himself to translating the various tablets and papyri he had collected. At length he comes upon the curse-stone from old Sepa's grave.

"Now, we do not realize when the *Uncinaria americana* infects our systems with its eggs, but anon we suffer drowsiness, anemia and dropsy. We have no desire to do anything but sit about and sleep—we have the disease known as hookworm, for the eggs have germinated. So it was with old Sepa's curse. *Monsieur* your uncle wrought out the translation of the curse-stone, and paid little heed to what he read—at first. But all the same the idea of a dreadful doom awaiting him who invaded that wicked old one's tomb was firmly lodged in his subconscious mind, and there it germinated, and grew into a monstrong thing, even as the hookworm's

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The Dust of Egypt

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eggs grow in the body of their victim. And when your uncle read of the young Englishman's death, and how he was the tenth to die of those who opened Tutankhamen's tomb, such doubts as he might have had disappeared utterly. He did resign himself to death by Sepa's vengeance.

"Your sister, being sensitive to thought-influence, at length became infected, too. It was as if your uncle, all unknowingly, transferred his fearful thoughts to her subconscious mind, much as a hypnotist imposes his thought and will upon his subject. Your sister is tall, stately, beautiful. She had the peculiar greenish eyes which go with mysticism. What more natural than that your uncle should have conceived the Goddess Aset as in your sister's image, and, so conceiving, impregnated your sister with his thought. All unknowingly, she was to him, and to herself, the very incarnation of that olden one—that probably non-existent one—whose wrath had been called down on *Monsieur* your kinsman by the curse-stone found in Sepa's grave.

"Very good. Upon the night in which your uncle died your sister did arise, descend the stairs into the museum, and there equip herself with the garments once worn by some Egyptian priestess. Consider, now: She did not consciously know what was in those cabinets below, she knew not which keys fitted the locks, she did not know how the ancient priestesses arrayed themselves, for she had no knowledge of archeology; yet she went unerringly to the proper case, chose the proper trappings, and donned them in the proper manner. Why? *Because your uncle's thought guided her!*

"All this she did at the urge of her subconscious mind. Her conscious mind, by which she recognized external things, was fast asleep meanwhile. Yet so deftly did her dream-commanded mind order the disguise that she even went so far as to trace the likeness of open, staring eyes upon her lids with phosphorescent paint.

"And then, arrayed as Aset, she did repair to your uncle's room, and with her went the thought-concept of another one, the thought-induced and thought-begotten likeness of the long-dead Sepa.

"With ancient ritual she read aloud your uncle's doom, the doom he had decreed upon himself by his persistent thought, and he—poor man!—believing that his doom was sealed, did die for very fright.

"Now, concerning yourself: Like her, you knew of the curse; like her you had read of the death of the young Englishman who violated the tomb of Tutankhamen. Very well. Subconsciously you feared the curse which Sepa had put upon your uncle and your uncle's kin hovered over you. Although you strove to shake it off, the thought would not die, for the more you dismissed it from your conscious mind, the deeper it penetrated into your subconscious, there to fester like a septic splinter in one's finger. Yes.

"Last night was the crucial time. Once more *Mademoiselle* your sister donned Aset's unholy livery; once more she did pronounce the doom of Sepa upon your uncle's kin—and, *parbleu*, she did almost succeed in doing it! Friend Trowbridge and I were not a second too soon, I damn think."

"But the mark—the mark on Uncle Absalom's breast, and which Dr. Trowbridge said appeared on mine, too; what of that?" young Monteith persisted.

"Perhaps you have not seen it, but

I have," de Grandin returned: "a hypnotist can, by his bare mental command, cause the blood to leave his subject's arm, and make the member become white and cold as death. So with the death-sign on your uncle's breast, and yours. It was but the stigma of a mental order—a thought made physically manifest."

"But what did you do—what did you use?" Monteith demanded. "I saw you drive the ghost of Sepa from the room with something. What was it?"

"To understand, you must know the history of Isis," de Grandin answered. "Her cult was one of the most powerful of all the ancient world. Despite the sternest opposition she had her votaries in both Greece and Rome, and she was the last of the old gods to be expelled from Egypt, for notwithstanding the Christianizing of the land and the great strength of the Alexandrian Church, her shrine at Philae continued to draw worshipers until the Sixth Century of our era.

"Now, while Christianity still struggled with the remnant of the olden faiths there lived in Alexandria a certain priest named Cyril, a very holy man, who by virtue of his piety wrought many miracles. Also, when more than once the women of his congregation declared themselves spellbound by the ancient Goddess Aset, he was wont to cast the spell from off them by the use of a certain sacred amulet, a little cross of gold supposed to hold a tiny remnant of the True Cross within itself. This very sacred reliquary is in the present custody of the *Papa* of the Greek Orthodox Church in Harrisonville. Often have I heard the old man speak of it.

"Accordingly, when we came here to 'Journey's End' to try conclusions with the ancient gods of Egypt, I begged the use of that same relic from its custodian and brought it with me.

"And, as I have said, thoughts have power. It was the thought of Priest Sepa's ancient curse which worked

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the death of your uncle and all but caused your own; yet here was a little, so small piece of gold which also carried the concentrated thought of centuries. Adored as a caster-out-of-spells by generations of pious Christians, once regarded as efficacious against the same old goddess by whom your house was so beset, it was ideally suited to my purpose. I did fight thought with counter-thought; against the evil thought-concepts of Aset and of Sepa her priest I set the defensive thought-power of Cyril, the Alexandrian monk, who once cast Aset forth from out the bodies of his bewitched parishioners. The tiny relic in my hand focussed, so to speak, the thoughts which negatived the harmful power of Aset and her followers, and —Aset and her ghostly worshiper are gone. If——"

"I—don't—believe—a—word—of—it!" Monteith interrupted slowly. "You're saying all this to shield Louella. She's bad—wicked clear through, and I don't ever want to see her again. I——"

"*Monsieur!*" de Grandin's voice was sharp-edged as a razor. "Look at this!"

Once more he drew the little golden cross of Cyril from his pocket, holding it before the young man's eyes. As young Monteith gazed wonderingly at it, the Frenchman continued in a low, earnest voice: "You will hear and obey. You will sleep for half an hour, at which time you will awake, completely forgetting all which occurred last night, remembering only that the thing which menaced your family and household has forever departed. Sleep. Sleep and forget. I command it!

"And that, my friend, is that," he announced matter-of-factly as Monteith's eyelids lowered in compliance with his order.

"Now what?" I asked.

"I think we would better burn the mummy of Priest Sepa and the translation of his curse-stone," he responded. "The uncle's will absolved his legatees from burying the mummy if it became physically impossible—I purpose rendering it so. Come, let us cremate the old one."

Together we dismembered the desiccated corpse of the Egyptian, casting the pieces on the glowing coals of the furnace, where they burned with sharp, fierce spurts of flame and quickly turned to light, gray ashes which wafted upward through the draft of the firebox.

"What about that uncanny feeling Louella complained of, de Grandin?" I asked as we pursued our grisly task. "You know, she said she felt as though someone were staring at her from behind?"

"*Mais oui,*" he chuckled as he fed a mumified forearm to the flames. "I shall say she had good cause to feel so. Did not the excellent Maggie and her husband stare her out of countenance from the rear, always seeking to see her take a third helping of food or wine? *Parbleu,* Mademoiselle Louella desired the boyish figure, therefore she eats sparingly, therefore she is tried and condemned by the so excellent Irish couple on the charge of being a fairy! *C'est drôle, n'est-ce-pas?*"

When we returned to the upper floor, David Monteith was up and disposing of an excellent breakfast.

"Good old Lou," we heard him tell his sister, "of course, I wasn't ill last night. I slept like a top—overslept, in fact; aren't I an hour late to breakfast?" He smiled and patted his sister's hand reassuringly.

"Ah, *parbleu,* Jules de Grandin, you are clever!" the little Frenchman murmured delightedly. "You have removed all danger from these young people and assured their happiness by exorcising the devil of bad memories. Yes. Come with me, Jules de Grandin; I shall take you to the library and give you a magnificent-great drink of whisky."

CREATION UNFORGIVABLE

by David H. Keller

"Once again came the whistling, piercing scream."

MY WIFE used to think that I took the writing game too seriously.

"There is no living with you or loving of you when you are at work on a story, and the longer the story, the longer the period of separation," she would say. I always answered her with a laugh and told her that was the penalty that she had to pay for marrying an artist.

For that was the way I looked at my writing. Prosaic enough it might seem to others to sit all day at a little low desk and pound the keys of a little old typewriter. Some of my friends told me that it was a poor way for a man of my ability to spend my time, but again I only answered with a laugh and told them that it made me happy.

All my life so far had been spent in comparative isolation in a little town. My outlook on life was apparently contracted, my opportunity for adventure slight. There were few persons to talk to, and, of those few, none who topped me intellectually. I should have been bitter, unhappy and misanthropic. My writing and

the far-away fields that it took me into were the panacea that made living a happy adventure, in spite of my surroundings.

I sold a story, and then another, and finally was able to buy a broken-down house and fifty acres of land, some miles from the center of the town. My first thought was to make the house livable for the wife. After that I hunted for some place to write. So far, I had been handicapped by the lack of suitable surroundings in which to pound the keys, composing what I hoped would be my masterpiece. Surely in fifty acres there should be some place where a man could find solitude, comfort and, mayhap, inspiration.

And without hunting for it I found it. A small one-room shack, the floor six by ten, the roof hardly six feet from the floor. It was some distance from the house, almost in the shadow of an overhanging ledge of rock and on the edge of a swamp. I went into that swamp once and found the mouth of a cave, but the mosquitoes were so bad that I determined to save further exploration till colder weather.

I was more handy with a typewriter than I was with a saw and hammer; so I put a carpenter to work. First, the roof had to be shingled, and then a new floor was imperative. Some windows supplied light and ventilation, while copper screens kept out the bugs. We put shelves on the walls, and I moved my books out there at the end of one week, and arranged them while a painter dabbled green paint all over the outside. At last I had a place for my desk and my typewriter.

It was a wonderful place to write. There was always light, but all through the day the sunlight was mellowed and softened and changed, either by the green of the trees or the black of the mountain. There was a stillness that was only made more intense by the singing birds and weariless crickets. We liked it, the wife and I, while the baby cried for a whole day when she found that it was going to be a workshop for an author rather than a playroom for a little girl. The wife threatened picnic suppers and I had to arrange for a fireplace and a brass pipe to carry water from a spring up on the hill.

After all was ready, I walked to town and bought five hundred more sheets of paper at the local sell-all store. They handled magazines; "handled" is the right word, for I never heard of anyone's buying any except myself, and I bought only the occasional number with a story in it by myself. With these five hundred sheets of white paper, carbon, a machine and an ideal location, I was sure that I could do something worth while.

My wife insisted that I took the game too seriously, and it is true that while writing I lived the part. My characters were real people to me, right up to the last line, and even to the minute that I wrote "THE END" at the bottom of the page. Only then would they fade and lose, in some way, their definite personalities to me. Not just so many word-people, but actual living persons, induced, for a few hours, to come with me and lead the adventuresome life that I thought out for them.

I loved them all, the heroes, ladies fair but frail, villains, sorry, evil, but, withal, lovable. They were perhaps the children of my creative mind, though at times I felt differently about them. Back of me were my ancestors, two parents and four grandparents and eight great-grandparents. How many, twenty generations back? How many, fifty? Where and who were my ancestors one hundred thousand years ago and what were they doing and how did they live? Part of them was in me. They contributed to making the personality of the unknown author in the forgotten backwash of

a country town. Perhaps when I created, I only brought up from the subconscious, from the deep pit of forgotten memories, portions of the lives of these distant relatives, dead a thousand years or a hundred centuries ago.

When I thought that I was creating, was that all that I was doing? Simply shutting my eyes and telling about the things that I saw these ancestors do? What an interesting conception of creative authorship! And what a merry, happy-go-lucky, hearty family I had in those olden days!

As usual, my wife asked me what I was going to write about next.

"It makes no fiddler's difference to me," she exclaimed for the tenth time, "what you write about, so long as you sell it. What makes me nervous is for you to spend a week or ten days toiling on a story, and then have a dozen editors write you that it is beautiful stuff but that their readers would hardly understand it. Write anything you want to, so long as you write the stuff that the editors will buy, for winter is coming on, and it is going to be a long winter, and I am tired of eating oatmeal and cutting down my old clothes to make dresses for Susanne."

I told her that I was going to write a tale of prehistoric days. I had thought of doing this for a long time, but always other plots thrust it back into obscurity for the time being. Now I recalled that I wanted to write a tale of the past ages. It would be so far past that no one could measure it with the yardstick of historic accuracy and say that I was not true to the facts as known to the dry and musty antiquarians. I wanted to go back to the caveman and the saber-toothed tiger. I wanted to go back to the mammoth and the painting of cave pictures. There was a story there, a tale that I had wanted to fasten on paper for a long time. Now I could do it.

To me it was an interesting story. I wrote ten pages the first day and told my wife the high spots of those ten pages as we spent a half hour on the gallery before going to our bedroom:

"The hero belongs to a race of supermen. They decided to move to the West, the land of the setting sun. Perhaps they wanted to follow the sun on account of the rapid advance of the ice-wall, the glacier in their own country. Their advance is through a strange country, and hardships of every kind make life an uncertain quantity. Not only are they fought by wild animals of a kind they have never seen before, but there are men, half man and half ape, who block their path and try to steal their women. The hero of the story is a young man who is the headman, because he is the bravest and strongest of them all. He is in love with a beautiful amazon in the tribe, who has said that she will not marry till she meets a man who is strong enough to conquer her in a wrestling match. The hero announces that he will endeavor to win this fight the next spring at the time of the yearly festival devoted to the sowing of the harvest and the mating of the unmarried in the tribe. Now, how is that for the beginning of a story of old times?"

My wife yawned.

"Fair," she commented, "but there is nothing original about it. It seems to me that I have read things like that before, and, from what you have told me, there is not a single thought in the whole ten pages that is new."

"You just wait till tomorrow," I answered as I went to sleep.

The next day I did fifteen pages. The hero killed a cave bear, had a hard fight with the chief of the apemen and brought back a horse as a present to his beloved amazon. She took it but made no promises as to

the future. Again I told my wife of the adventures of the invading tribe.

"I am beginning to warm up to these people that I am writing about," I said gravely. "I like them. Today, when the hero was in a fight with the ape-man, I should have let the half ape kill him. He was the better fighter, but I just could not bear to see the poor fellow torn limb from limb; I almost love him, he is so clever and manly; so, just when things seemed the darkest, he remembered a wrestling trick, tossed the ape-man over his back and down a thousand-foot precipice. How is that? The heroine, the wrestling amazon, sees the fight and cries her approval. She joins him and binds up his wounds with some sacred herbs and leaves so that they heal in no time."

"I suppose," my wife asked, "that this amazon is very beautiful?"

"She certainly is. Of course, she is strong as can be, but her muscles are not bunched, and, just to look at her, you would think that she was a delicate young girl. She is a blond——"

"I might have known that!" cried my wife. "Oh, you men! Now, there is just one more woman in the world to keep you from dreaming about me."

"I don't have to dream about you," I whispered softly.

"That is nicely said, at any rate."

I wrote all morning, and right after dinner of the next day I said that I was going immediately back to the writing shack. Just as I was leaving the house, my wife called me:

"I forgot to tell you. The Jones folks want us to go riding with them this afternoon, stay for supper and bridge, and we shall not be back till nearly midnight. Will you go?"

"I do not want to. I have a very special reason for not wanting to."

"But I think that we had better go."

"All right," I sighed and walked slowly back to the house, "I will go with you, but I am very anxious to write another chapter or two of my story."

"Just why?"

"Oh! I will tell you later on. No use to now."

We went out with the Jones family in their automobile. They, like all other car owners, took us to a dozen places that we did not care to see, and the places that we wanted to see we passed at sixty miles an hour. However, they served a fine supper and they played a very stiff game of bridge. I played poorly that night. Somehow, my mind was not on the game.

We were driven back home at eleven in the Jones automobile. Instead of starting to undress at once, I asked the wife if she would care very much if I took a lantern, went out to the workshop and finished the chapter.

"I have been worried about those people all the time that I was playing cards," I explained, "and that is why I played so poorly. I can not remember the plays and the science of bridge when I am worrying about the people in my stories."

"Well, what is the matter with them now?" the wife asked, sleepily.

"Matter enough. That amazon went hunting in the forest and the ape-folks caught her. The hero heard her cries for help, and without waiting to gather his tribe he dashed off to rescue her. There was a fight, really a very wonderful fight. You would have been pleased to see the way that that chieftain tore those ape-men, but they were too many for him, and at the end they caught him —threw a rock at him and hit him on the head, and when he recovered consciousness he was tied, hand and foot, with grapevines, and the only pleasure that he had out of it was that he was close to the amazon, and she told him at last that she loved him and that, if they ever escaped and lived till the time of the spring festival, she would allow him to throw her in the wrestling match and be his woman

as a consequence. He is very much of a man, and, before I realized it, he was telling her that he was going to conquer her, whether she used her full strength or not, and then they quarreled. Think of that! Both of them captured by ape-men and bound so there was no hope of escape, and then quarreling instead of spending their last hours telling each other how much they were in love."

"Well," yawned my wife, "they are tied there and they will be there tomorrow morning when you start working again; so come to bed."

"But you do not understand. These ape-men do not intend to kill them themselves. They will sacrifice them to their god. There is a cave animal, something like a dragon, and whenever the moon is full, the thing comes out of his cave. The ape-men tie slaves and prisoners to stakes in front of this cave, and in the brilliant light of the full moon this dragon comes out and eats the human sacrifice.

"When I came in to dinner, that was the situation that the hero and the amazon were in. They were tied to the stakes, waiting for the time to come when they would be torn limb from limb. It was to happen that night. I ought to have kept on writing and in some way rescued them from that terrible situation. I had no right to make them and then simply go off and play bridge and let them die—just like dogs or ape-men. To do that was a creation unforgivable. I wish you would let me go out and write just a few pages. I could make a terrible storm come or an eclipse that would make the night dark and frighten the ape-folks into the belief that these white strangers were gods."

"Oh! Let's go to bed. You take these things too seriously," insisted my wife.

"I can not help it," I whispered. "While I am writing the story, it seems in some way that the characters are alive."

But I went to bed. At least, I pretended to go, but I simply waited till certain of the wife's slumbers, and then put on some old clothes, stole downstairs, lit a lantern, and started on the long walk to the little shack at the edge of the woods. I was about two-thirds of the way when I heard a howl, a cry unearthly and deadly in its threatening portent. And after that a woman's voice, terror-stricken—a woman facing horrible death, without hope or help, crying her anguish, because she could not control her longing to live—just one more day. She wanted to live to see the sun shine, to roam through the forest once again. She wanted to wrestle with this man and have the glorious satisfaction of knowing that he was going to conquer her and make her his woman. All these things she longed for, and now she knew the utter hopelessness of it, and in her despair she cried to the pitiless world. And in answer came a gibberish of laughter. The ape-folk were glorying in her despair. Their cup of happiness would be filled if only the man would cry and beg for mercy. And once again came the whistling, piercing scream.

I was angry at myself. What business had I to be playing bridge and let these children of my brain suffer thus? There was still time to rescue them. If only I could reach the typewriter in the next five minutes! I started to run. And now there was a trinity of noises beating in my ears, the snarl of the animal, no longer able to breathe freely on account of his flesh-filled mouth, his blood-choked nostrils; there were a few screams of beings torn apart, who, had they lived, might have been the progenitors of Athenian culture, the forefathers of the best families in Rome. And above and intermingled with these cries of final dying despair came the chuckling, hellish laughter of beings who never, for a million years, would be anything but apes.

I started to run.

"Wait, wait! I am coming! I am not going to let you die! Not that way! Not after I created you and made you possible lords of creation," I cried as I ran, sobbing, and in my despair I caught my toe against a root and fell, head against rock, senseless.

MORNING came. The wife awoke and missed me. Her first thought was that I had gone to the shack on the edge of the woods.

She found me unconscious, fifty yards from the shack. My head was bleeding from the cut on the rock. My clothes were torn, and here and there over my body were long deep scratches, a few of which cut through the skin to the muscles underneath. She was so occupied with me and my condition that she had no eyes for anything else. It took time to call a neighbor and send for a doctor, but at last I was in bed, all tended to and bandaged and very much alive. It seems that my wife spread the news that I had gone out to the shack and met a wildcat. There were cats in the woods; so, the story was credited.

It was two days before I was able to walk to the shack. I begged my wife to let me go alone. For her sake, I took a revolver, though I knew that it was not necessary. She wanted to go, but I just laughed at her fears. So, I walked to the shop where I manufactured stories and people.

The place looked worse than I had suspected. One side of the hut was smashed in as though hit by a terrific battering-ram. The roof sagged; its supports were broken. With the greatest difficulty, I pried open the door and made my way inside. The typewriter was twisted, broken; its delicate steel fingers would never again write magically on white paper. The table was splintered into matchwood, and all of the manuscripts littered the floor in contorted confusion. The papers looked peculiar; even from a distance they had a peculiar smell. I picked one sheet up, and it stuck to my fingers.

I saw the whole truth then.

Those red blotches on the manuscript were blood blots!

There was an oil lamp that had, by some devilish twist of fate, remained unbroken when the antediluvian storm broke over my little world. I emptied the oil on the manuscript, threw a match into it and walked out into the sunlight of God's beautiful world. I started to walk to the house where my wife and baby were waiting for me.

Undecided, I turned, and walked, as though in a dream, to the edge of the swamp, and there I saw tracks in the mud, some as large as the pads of an elephant, and others man-shaped, but with the great toe far apart. Most of these man-footed marks ended at the base of great live oaks, but the large pads, that sank a foot into the ground till they could secure footing for the mass above them—those tracks went on through the woods and ended at the mouth of the cave.

I am never going to go into that cave.

And something else besides the mosquitoes is holding me back.

EARTHWORMS of KARMA

By Lon Dexter

"Kiser caught his upraised hand and snatched the knife from his fingers."

The Story Thus Far

LANDING safely on the planet Mars after a voyage from Earth, Professor Hervy and his daughter Ruth send Joseph Kiser, the third member of the party, to reconnoiter the Martian city which lies across the canal. He is met by one of the Martian scientists, whose niece, Delam Oblene, warns him that he is in danger. He does not return to the space-ship, but Hervy and his daughter are hospitably received by the Martians and taken to the city in a "kandike," or small airship. They learn that the Martians are all reincarnated Earthlings, retaining a knowledge of their last life on Earth. After weeks of search, Kiser is seen, apparently out of his mind, and he seizes Ruth and runs off with her into the forest, which is inhabited by a race of sub-men known as "marbs."

8. A Warning and a Fight

"I AM very grateful to you for your warning, Delam Oblene. I have sensed that things are not just right here; would you mind telling me the nature of the danger which threatens me?" Kiser's voice showed no trace of fear as he spoke, although his voice was subdued lest it might carry to the acute ears of the sentinel Crobe.

This story began in WEIRD TALES for July

"I, too, sensed a flaw in my uncle's hospitality when he was so annoyed at my own unexpected appearance upon the scene. Afterward, quite by accident, I overheard him discussing with his assistant, Anhul Pilluth, a plan to dispose of you permanently."

"Dispose of me! Why should he wish to dispose of me?"

"For the most part to further his insane desire for scientific knowledge, and secondarily for patriotic reasons. He considers you and your discovery a menace to Masovada if you should be allowed to return to Earth and announce the success of your voyage."

"And how does he plan to dispose of me?"

"He has perfected an operation by means of which he transfers the intelligence of one being to the physical body of another, and he plans to interchange your personality with that of Nebond, a young marb which has but recently been domesticated. Furthermore, he has set Crobe, another marb, to watch you, and were he to learn that you had escaped your room he would probably become violently angry and run amuck. Crobe has the strength of many men and if he should run amuck he would undoubtedly kill you before anything could be done to stop him."

Ignoring her reference to Crobe, Kiser asked: "Just what would it mean to me if he performed such an operation?"

"It would mean that your mind and your intelligence would occupy the body of Nebond, the marb. Nebond will possess your body and you his. You will have your own memory, your own mentality—inasmuch as it can function through the brain of a marb, which you will have in place of your own.

"Of course you will be unable to use the brain of a marb as you would use your own. The brute will be able to use yours better than he did his own once he gets accustomed to it, will do things which you would loathe to see your physical body do, and eat things at which you would rebel if you knew. He will reason only as a marb, or slightly better due to the fact that he has a human brain at his disposal."

"I am indeed grateful to you, Delam Oblene, for having warned me. I shall take French leave of Kabo and let him look elsewhere for his experimental material."

"Yes, you must go at once, but pray do not mention that Kabo has entertained you; for should it be known that he had done so without reporting the matter to the Legislative Council he would incur the disfavor of all Masovada. It would humiliate him very much and would profit you nothing."

"But how was he to communicate with the authorities so soon?"

"He has but to attune his mind to a certain vibration to send his thoughts wheresoever he wills."

"Ah, telepathy!"

"No, not telepathy. In the Masovadan brain there is a concentration center and in the nostrils of the Masovadan there are certain cells sensitized to receive all thought vibration which is attuned in harmony with them. Thus we are able to project our thoughts to anyone whose vibratory rate we know and concentrate upon."

"Indeed I shall say nothing of having met with Kabo. But where had I best go?"

"I shall conduct you by kandike back to your craft, and tomorrow I shall provide for your being found by the proper person. Please do not judge Masovadan hospitality by that of my poor deluded uncle, who would sacrifice his honor to his mania for scientific achievement and his desire to solve one of the mooted questions of the age. Remain well hidden here in the shadows and I will return with the kandike presently."

"But might you not encounter Crobe upon your way to the landing-terrace?"

"I have nothing to fear from Crobe so long as he doesn't suspect that you have escaped him. I shall——"

Just what she had intended to say Kiser never knew, for just at that moment there was a coarse growl behind them, and, turning suddenly, they stood face to face with the giant Crobe; his eyes protruding to the extreme limit of their telescoping pedicles and glowing ominously, his huge teeth bared like those of an angry dog, and his whole attitude threatening as he stood poised as though ready to spring forward and annihilate everything in his path.

True to Delam Oblene's prediction Crobe had flown into a rage at sight of the Earthman in the garden. He growled and stamped his foot in anger, and as Kiser watched he saw white froth appear upon his lips.

Delam Oblene addressed the beast in the strange musical language of the Martians; her tone was emphatic and she pointed toward the house but the marb appeared not to have heard. She stepped forward and repeated her command with yet more emphasis, but by this time the beast was in a frenzy of rage, and as she approached him, he stooped and snapped viciously, barely missing her outstretched hand.

Then it was that Delam Oblene did a very Earth-like feminine thing. She sprang back with a scream — and fainted.

Knowing his own superior strength, Kiser had first planned merely to evade the beast and hold his attention until Delam Oblene should have had time to get her kandike and return, but when he saw the enraged animal attempt violence to the girl he changed his plan—or rather, the plan changed itself, and he leapt forward, covering the distance between them at a single bound. Striking with all his strength behind the blow, he landed squarely upon the receding chin of his antagonist just as the beast bent his long neck forward to resume the quarrel at the point where Delam Oblene had interrupted it.

There was a loud snap like the crack of a whip and Crobe was flung far backward, to land upon his shoulders limp and inert, his neck broken and his face crushed as though he had been struck by a ten-ton truck! Kiser's blow had been delivered with all the strength of muscles developed upon a planet whose gravitational pull was much greater than Mars, and the Martian creatures were not so constructed as to enable them to withstand such violence.

The growls of Crobe and the girl's scream had aroused Kabo, and suddenly, as if by magic, the garden was brilliantly illuminated, showing Crobe lying mangled and dead and Kiser kneeling beside the prostrate form of Delam Oblene.

"A nice guest you are, indeed!" said Kabo with biting sarcasm.

Kiser turned his head slightly to face Kabo, but did not rise. He was unwilling to accuse the Martian of the perfidy which the girl had attributed to him and thus betray that she had warned him.

"No harm meant, I assure you," he said. "I strolled out into the garden to enjoy the moonlight and your niece followed me here to warn me about some supposed danger from Crobe. True to her fears, he attacked me and I fear that I have killed him, for which I am very sorry; it seems that I am much stronger upon Mars than I was upon Earth."

"A pretty story indeed!" snarled Kabo. "You *Earthworm!* Is there yet no decency upon your filthy planet? I shall not await the morrow to settle with you!"

Kiser rose hastily and started to voice an angry protest, when he noticed for the first time a small box which Kabo carried under his arm. Could this be a weapon? As he opened his mouth to speak, his tongue was very thick, his knees sagged, his vision blurred, and there seemed a

faint, far-away ringing in his ears; he then seemed to be falling through untold millions of miles of space and into—oblivion!

9. *Transformation*

JOSEPH KISER awoke with a feeling of intense drowsiness. His lids seemed heavy and he was unable to see well or control the direction of his vision for some moments after he had succeeded in opening his eyes.

At length he glanced about him. A white-uniformed nurse sat beside the bed upon which he lay and he tried to speak to her, but his tongue was thick and the best he did was an unintelligible grunt.

His mouth seemed much too large and he controlled his facial muscles with difficulty. When he attempted to raise a hand to his face he noted with wonder that he was in a strait-jacket, and his wrists were lean and hairy!

Again he essayed to speak to the nurse, but his tone startled him into silence, for it was coarse and rasping like the growl of an animal and he was quite unable to control his tone or inflection.

"Where am I?" he asked at last in a voice that was utterly unrecognizable.

The nurse gave him a perplexed stare. She spoke some words in the Martian tongue and Kiser thought she appeared to be somewhat mystified at this patient who appeared to be fully awake and yet who had attempted to converse in an altogether unintelligible tongue. She pushed a button which was fastened upon the wall, and after a lapse of some moments, Kabo stepped into the room.

At sight of Kabo the memory of the experience of the last evening came vaguely back into Kiser's mind. He remembered his stroll about Kabo's gardens, his being warned of some seemingly remote danger by a wonderful Martian girl, his fight with Crobe—but why was he thus invalided and bound? "What has happened to me?" he roared in his strange gruff voice, turning his head the better to see the Martian, for, although it may have been mere fancy begot of his recent surroundings, his eyes seemed to be protruding, telescoping and unwieldy.

There was a triumphant gleam in Kabo's eye, and Kiser went cold as he suddenly recalled the text of Delam Oblene's warning and the Martian's threat just as he had lost consciousness. This, together with the recollection of the appearance of his arm upon awakening, sent a thrill of intense horror through him and he strove with desperation to loosen the thongs which held his wrists.

"You must lie still," remarked Kabo calmly, although his tone was not unkind. "Above all things you must not worry and struggle like this; you may do yourself great injury if you continue to do so."

Kiser calmed himself with an effort. "Did you carry out your dastardly design upon me? Did you exchange my physical body for that of a beast as you planned?"

Kabo showed his surprize. "How did you happen to suspect that I might have had designs upon you?" he asked.

When Kiser did not answer but began again to pull and tug frantically in another effort to free himself, the Martian gave some instructions to the nurse, who at once administered a hypodermic.

"You must desist in your efforts to free yourself lest you injure your chance of recovery. I shall see you again when you are stronger." With this Kabo turned and left the room.

KISER saw no more of Kabo for several days, saw no one, in fact, except the nurse, and he was unable to converse with her; but since his talk with the Martian he had been kept under the influence of some

powerful narcotic, either in a deep sleep or so benumbed that he took no interest in himself or his surroundings.

Just how long he was kept under the influence of drugs Kiser never knew, but it must have been for several days; for, when again he gained control of his sensibilities, most of his soreness was gone and he had regained his strength to a marked degree. He could pull and wrench at the straps which bound him without pain or discomfort, but he could not break them. For some moments he strove desperately to free himself, and when quite exhausted he turned his head to look for the nurse. She had left the room, but in his efforts he had uncovered his chest and he noted with horror that it was not his own chest at all! Instead it was very broad and sloped upward at a grotesque and unsightly angle, and was thickly covered with long reddish-black hair!

Then it was that realization of the truth came to him. Kabo had exchanged his intelligence for that of a huge marb! Here was he, his soul, his intelligence, his individuality, occupying the physical body of a filthy beast!

Stunned and horrified by the realization of this terrible truth, he ground his huge strong teeth in impotent rage. He longed to strike Kabo just such a blow as he had struck Crobe; he could picture the large but comparatively frail Martian crumpling before the force of his mighty muscles and he strove with renewed energy to free himself. Surely no Martian bond could hold him; him whose mighty blow had crushed in the skull of a marb! But, alas!—and the thought came to him with sickening horror—he no longer possessed the sinews of an Earthman! Physically he was a marb although he possessed the mentality of a man! Was ever any poor creature treated with such fearful injustice? His mind writhed in an agony of wrath and he struggled with desperation at the bonds which held his wrists and ankles. They held, but surely they could not withstand such violence for long! Some day they would break and then he would rend Kabo limb from limb. This was such an exceptional case as to make murder a virtue! And Kiser raged on, tugging, wrenching, snarling, and foaming at the mouth until forced to desist from sheer exhaustion.

The nurse re-entered the room, and at sight of her he again flew into a convulsive rage, swearing, biting, and struggling against the straitjacket. The nurse drew back in fright but secured a long pointed strap from her handbag and approaching the bed struck Kiser a stinging lash across his thighs.

Surprized and outraged, Kiser desisted for the moment to stare with wonder and resentment at the Martian girl. Apparently she was not overjoyed at being special nurse to a marb and she intended to enforce a certain degree of discipline even if it required coercive measures to do so. Evidently she had been chosen for this duty because she did not speak English, and undoubtedly she was ignorant of the fact that the creature before her was other than the beastly marb he appeared to be.

She seemed more frightened than relieved, however, at the expression in Kiser's eye as he looked at her now, and running quickly across the room, she again pushed the button with which she had previously summoned Kabo.

At sight of his malefactor as he entered the room accompanied by his assistant, Anhul Pilluth, Kiser was so overcome with rage that he could not speak. For a moment he lay and glared with intense hatred at the two of them, and then with all his strength he pulled and twisted at the restraining straitjacket. The leather-like straps creaked and stretched un-

der his efforts, but they held fast. At length he recovered his voice and hurled at Kabo a most violent imprecation, stating in no uncertain terms just what he intended to do when he should succeed in making his escape.

"You certainly have worked yourself up to a most frightful amuck," said Kabo calmly after he had dismissed the nurse. "The marb brain and the Earthly temperament work beautifully together, I see, to say nothing of the beautiful body I have given you; a wonderful improvement over your former self, I call it. Go ahead and struggle if you must; you could not release yourself in a dozen years and it will do you no harm now. I am sure it would be useless to tell you to desist, for you are now equipped with the brain of a marb and you will find it more difficult to control yourself than formerly, if that is possible."

"You are a liar! I have my own brain, although you devils have given me a marb's body!"

"Oh, no. You have Nebond's brain. Only the pineal glands and a portion of the solar plexus were transplanted. It was your *mind* which I interchanged; not your brains. The brain is but the medium of contact of the mind with the physical body. The more important seat of the ego or consciousness is in the solar plexus, through which functions the so-called subconscious mind. By means of the pineal body we are enabled to remember past events, but we recall them through the functioning of the physical brain; therefore I transferred that organ so that you could remember your past rather than that of Nebond as would have been the case had I not done this interchange."

"You are a fiend! What right have you to tamper with my soul, or that of the beast if he has one? I came here from another planet and you take me in under the pretense of hospitality merely to take advantage of my confidence to perpetrate upon me a crime ten thousand times more heinous than murder! You introduced me into a world in which you say crime has been abolished, and at that very moment you were formulating a crime unprecedented in its horror! What do you hope to gain by this? What benefit can you or your planet possibly derive from such a gruesome experiment as this?"

"Alas, what you say is only too true, and I regret very much to have betrayed your confidence; but the end justifies the means. I have sacrificed you to science and you should feel honored. I owe you an apology, however, for having misjudged your motive with reference to my niece."

"You owe me far more than an apology! What has happened to my body? The marb who possesses my body had better be guarded carefully, for I shall hold you responsible for any mishap which may occur to him and in any way injure my physical body."

"Why should you worry about what may or may not happen to that which was yours but is now the body of a marb? The body which you have here is now yours; the other one is his."

Kiser was fast losing control of his temper. "I shall not suffer this state to continue. You have had your experiment at my expense, and now I demand that you restore me to my rightful body!"

"And destroy an experiment of which I have dreamed all of my life? Hardly! Surely, Earthman, you do not consider your puny little physical body of more importance than the scientific knowledge to be derived from the furtherance of this experiment! I was not surprized that the marb objected to the thing, and by the way, he was even more bitter than you; when he awoke and learned the truth his lamentations were most terrible to behold. He has been kept under the influence of the Strotan

Ray until the present, because we have no straitjacket strong enough to hold him. Perhaps in my old age, when I have watched the progress of the experiment to my heart's content, I shall restore you to your Earth form if you can sustain yourself and if Nebond can sustain your Earth-body for that long. At present, however, I shall make no such change; I have started and I shall see this interesting experiment through to the end, however wicked you may think me for so doing."

"You are not only a scoundrel but a coward!" roared Kiser in a rage. "If you do not undo this thing you have done to me, neither you nor I will live to be old; you may rest assured of that!"

Anhul Pilluth had stood all the while, his face expressionless, apparently desiring to take no further part in the tragic drama which was being enacted at the expense of the Earthling. Kiser imagined that he saw the stamp of disapproval at the jeering remarks of Kabo as he watched the face of the younger Martian, but he could not be certain.

Pilluth was a much larger man than Kabo and his face was very intellectual, if an Earthling might judge rightly; his eyes seemed milder and less domineering than Kabo's, and Kiser involuntarily wondered if this man did not already regret his part in the ghastly affair.

"Nothing would please me more," said Kiser as the two Martians left the room, "than to see your assistant, who appears much more intelligent than you—than to watch him while he transfers your soul to the body of—of an earthworm!"

He felt, however, that nothing could be more wasted than efforts to taunt Kabo; he appeared to have no resentment, no emotion whatsoever but his insatiable desire to perfect his scientific supremacy and—oh yes! his hatred of Earth and all things Earthly.

Kiser regretted his hasty remark, which had betrayed the fact that he foreknew Kabo's intentions with regard to him, lest it might have caused him to suspect Delam Oblene's real mission in the garden; for he felt that otherwise Kabo was ignorant of the fact that his niece knew of his plans or suspected the fate to which he had subjected the Earthling.

If only Delam Oblene might find him her influence might be brought to bear upon Kabo and prevail upon him to right the wrong he had done.

He wondered what had become of his sweetheart and her father but dared not inquire of them to Kabo for fear that the Martian might subject them also to a fate like his own. If only he might escape and go to them! But no, he could not bear the thought of Ruth's seeing him in this state! Perhaps she was even now awaiting his return in an agony of suspense, wondering, hoping, praying; yet not dreaming the dreadful fate that had befallen him.

And yet it must be remembered that Kiser's intelligence was functioning through the sluggish brain of Nebond, the marb, and therefore he was incapable of the extremes of emotion which he might have suffered had he had a human brain; that is probably the reason that the next few weeks of mental anguish, humiliation, and despair did not drive him mad.

Had Delam Oblene forgotten her promise or had Kabo told her that Kiser had escaped and returned to Earth? Perhaps she suspected the fate that had befallen him but had been unable to find him. For some twenty days now he had not seen Kabo and all of this time he had lain bound as he had found himself upon awakening, but he managed to exercise his muscles somewhat each day. The nurse had left him now and only came to bring his meals and feed him twice each day.

One evening just at twilight the door of his room opened softly and

someone entered. Thinking it was the nurse returning to perform some unfinished duty Kiser did not turn for some moments, but when, after a time, he heard no further sound he opened his eyes suddenly to see Delam Oblene gazing sorrowfully down upon him. At first the sight of the Martian girl caused him a distinct thrill of hopeful joy, but this was immediately supplanted by a sense of shame that she should behold the grotesqueness of his appearance and witness the evidence of his complete defeat at the hands of Kabo.

"Oh, I am so sorry!" whispered Delam Oblene, her voice trembling with emotion, her eyes tearful and sympathetic. "This is a terrible outrage! I shall demand that you be liberated at once! If the council should learn of this outrage, Kabo would be severely punished; he will not dare defy me."

"I can not express, Delam Oblene, how glad I am to see you!" faltered Kiser. "For days and days you have been the only ray of hope that I have dared hold on to. But beware! do not put yourself in Kabo's power; he is the vilest demon in the universe! He will stop at nothing, and it is unsafe to threaten him. He does not know that you are aware of his perfidy; would it not be safer to go at once to the council with the news of his crime than to risk an argument with him? Heaven knows what he might do to you if you antagonize him."

"Oh, no, that would not be fair. We must give him a chance. He will not harm me; such things are not done upon Mars. He would not have dared to injure you had he known that there were others in your party. Just now they are making exhaustive search for you and Kabo is greatly worried. He told me that Crobe injured you very severely in the garden and that he feared your reason might be permanently impaired when you recovered, but enjoined me to say nothing about your having been here lest we be blamed for allowing harm to come to you. I do not know what disposition he intends to make of your body, but I rather fear he intends to kill Nebond so that your body may be found and accounted for as soon as the scars of the operation have disappeared under his treatment. That is, in his judgment, necessary, since I chanced to see you, which was contrary to his plans. To kill Nebond, you see, would not be murder, for Nebond is only a marb. Had I not accidentally come upon the two of you in the garden archway and had there not been others from Earth to tell of your disappearance, Kabo could have kept both bodies and observed the results of his art to his heart's content."

"But my friends — what of them? Are they safe? Are they not in Kabo's power?"

"They are quite safe. They are the guests of Frambrozo Himnun, whose father in his Earth life was none other than your own Benjamin Franklin."

"Thank heaven for that! I have been in an agony of suspense for them. But what do you mean by his Earth life? Have others come from Earth to Mars?"

"In spirit only. Your party is the only exception. Do you not remember what was told you regarding the reincarnation upon Masovada?"

"Yes indeed! I remember clearly now, but my marb brain functions but slowly."

"I must not tarry longer. I shall go at once to Kabo and demand that you be released from your horrible predicament."

"Whatever else you may do, Delam Oblene, be careful. Why not go away and broadcast your challenge to him from a distance? Is there not some way in which you may insure yourself against harm?"

"I do not fear my uncle. I shall go to him in person with my ultimatum. There is naught to fear."

Less than an hour after Delam Oblene had taken her leave Kabo entered Kiser's room. Under his arm was that same instrument he had used so effectually upon that memorable night in the garden and upon his lips was a smile that might have meant menace or chagrin.

"It is unfortunate," he said, "that in our stroll about my garden on the evening of your arrival we chanced to meet my niece and still more unfortunate that she chanced to overhear the discussion of our plans."

Kiser attempted to smile, but as the mouth of a marb is not made to accommodate the effort to smile, it is to be feared that the thing he really did was to grimace horribly.

"I can not understand," he said, "how you are able to construe that as a misfortune. Delam Oblene has demanded my release at your hands and you dare not refuse that demand for obvious reasons."

"Remarkable reasoning that! And with the brain of a marb too! Well it *is* most unfortunate from *her* standpoint. She shall be punished for her insubordination and my experiment shall proceed as I have planned it. I shall not desist until I shall have mated you with a female marb and made the necessary observations regarding the mentality of the offspring."

"Then your experiment will fail!" roared Kiser in a rage. "Whatever you may do to my body, my soul is that of a man and a gentleman; I will remain as I am forever rather than consort with beasts!"

He strained again at the thongs which bound him to the bed. If only one of them would yield he could quickly free himself and then he would avenge himself upon this demon in a very gratifying manner. He felt his face go hot and he knew that it had attained that fiery red which he had twice seen in a marb running amuck. He continued to struggle until his reason began to return, when he gave up the effort and lay quite still.

Kabo smiled approvingly. "Wonderful self-control for a marb! You can run amuck and recover your reason rather more quickly than the average marb. Now I must move you; I shall give you only enough of the Ray to benumb your senses, for you must walk and do my bidding; it would be far too difficult to move you otherwise, for now I must work alone."

There was a slight buzzing sound as the tiny motor of the Strotan Ray machine was started, and Kiser experienced the same sensation as that which had overcome him in Kabo's garden. There was a whirring and buzzing in his ears and he seemed to be traveling through space, until at length he found himself standing upright, clinging for support to an ill-kept suspended bed in an almost barren room with one barred window and a stone floor.

Beyond the window and well out of his reach stood Kabo, and upon the wall just a few inches from the opening—the window had no glass—was a large mirror. One glance at the reflection of himself in this mirror and Kiser uttered a cry of horror. For weeks he had known he had the physical body of a marb, but when he saw his reflection in the mirror the horror of the situation struck him with such force that he was terrified by the gravity of his fearful predicament. He stared impotently at his reflection and then, with a scream of anguish, flung himself against the bars in an effort to reach his malefactor. These bars were very strong, however, and he only received several cuts and bruises for his trouble.

Recoiling from the rebound impetus given him by his contact with the barred window, he staggered back a few paces, but recovered his equilibrium and advanced upon his enemy again, when he chanced to see upon one of the panels a long wriggling vermin which he had injured; it looked

for all the world like an earthworm and, having a natural loathing for such things, Kiser stopped short, desisting in his efforts to reach his enemy rather than touch it again.

Kabo laughed. "Oh, you need not shudder at such creatures as that! It is the lowest form of animal life we have upon Masovada, but, at that, he doesn't have as far to go to reach your stage in evolution as you must yet go to reach perfection. He isn't so far behind you as you might fancy, but if your friend Nebond should chance to see him he would eat him with great relish!"

10. Nebond

For some weeks Nebond had been allowed the freedom of a small, well-constructed enclosure in the central and isolated portion of Kabo's estate. No one except the scientist himself ever went near this part of the grounds, as the privacy he had always maintained was respected by all and there was little likelihood that this part of the estate would be trespassed upon.

Nebond did not know what had been done to him—he had been horribly mistreated; his beautiful and shapely body had been transformed into this grotesque, white, naked, slender one. Perhaps he had been very sick during the time which he so vaguely remembered, during which Kabo had ministered to him; for his features were fearfully distorted and his eyes drawn back into his forehead and fixed there! When he viewed himself in the water basin which Kabo had provided for him inside the hovel where he slept he would fly into a rage and pound himself violently upon the chest with growling lamentations.

Gradually, however, he became somewhat reconciled to this objectionable state of affairs, but his enforced solitude was making him very ill-tempered. He was becoming a cross, lazy, slothful marb—a marb with the physical body of an Earth-being, but a marb nevertheless.

One day, quite by accident, Nebond discovered that he possessed far greater physical strength than he had formerly had. Inside the enclosure where he was imprisoned grew a small tree, perhaps three inches in diameter at the ground and about three feet tall, and this he chanced to grapple with while at the height of one of his frenzied outbursts; and to his surprize and delight it came up by the roots!

The muscles of Joseph Kiser, developed upon Earth where much more physical strength is necessary than upon Mars, had potentialities little dreamed of by their erstwhile owner, and having received this hint of his unsuspected prowess, he next tackled the hydrant, which likewise yielded to his efforts and came away from its anchorage, with resultant inundation.

With his scant clothing thoroughly wet and his efforts to stop the flow of water unsuccessful, Nebond's mild frenzy became a raging amuck and in utter abandon he flung himself against the wall of his enclosure, crushing it as though it were an eggshell, and the infuriated marb stepped out—free!

Thus encouraged, he proceeded to vent his wrath upon everything within his reach. The walls about the grounds he laid low, uprooting other small trees and shrubbery, destroying the stalls or enclosures for protection of many of the other animals, and striking boldly out at length across the suburban district of Sendos, destroying everything which would yield to his strength, until he came to the canal. There his frenzy of rage passed off quite as suddenly as it had appeared, and here he was discovered by Himnun, Ruth and Professor Hervy.

Vaguely and without a great deal of interest Nebond wondered who these creatures were and why they

had approached him. Perhaps they were representatives of the Council coming to reckon with him for his recent dreadful amuck? Should he submit to the authorities as he had always done heretofore? No; there was a spark of something in him now that bade him defy the authorities. Now that his amuck was ended he would not harm them unless they attempted to harm him, but if they did that—well, they would have to take the consequences!

The three creatures had drawn nearer now and were conversing in some strange dialect. They seemed to be addressing him—but no, perhaps not, for he could not understand them. He noted casually that two of them were horrid hollow-eyed beings like himself; and yes—he was quite certain now that they were addressing him, but what could they be saying?

He condescended now to give them some of his coveted attention. He saw or sensed that the smaller of the three was a girl. Ah! Kabo had promised him a mate; perhaps this was the one. He would have much preferred one such as he had had in the forest before his capture, but this one had features like his own as reflected in the drinking-bowl inside his hovel, and perhaps Kabo had captured her for him. At any rate there was no other to be had and this one would do.

Nebond was convinced of the truth of his surmise when the girl approached him without fear and began stroking his hand caressingly, although he could understand no word of what she was saying; perhaps she was even now begging to be allowed to accompany him back to his hovel!

Ruth was somewhat frightened when this mad creature snatched her up in his arms and ran away from the spot, but even yet she could not bring herself to believe that Joseph Kiser would harm her. For several years she had known and trusted him; she recalled his gentleness, his gallantry, his great love for her, and, although she realized that he was now quite mad, she could not associate him with any degree of villainy despite the evidence to the contrary. She talked to him, pleaded with him, begged him to answer and say that he had not forgotten her—little realizing that this, the physical body of her lover, now housed the soul of a vile and savage beast whose physical brain, though in itself a human brain, could no more respond to Kiser's love for her than that of a dead person can respond.

The comparatively slight Martian gravitation offered but little antagonism to the creature's Earth-developed sinews, and soon they arrived at Kabo's garden. Here Nebond stopped short — his hovel and the enclosure which encircled it were demolished. Nebond had forgotten that he had destroyed these walls which had held him prisoner, and now that he was returning with a mate for himself there was no place for him to take her!

He stood Ruth upon the ground and stood for a moment viewing the ruins all about him. What was he to do? Should he attempt to rebuild the hovel? Oh no! He would not do that! Should he dare to defy the authorities and return to the forest from which he had been taken? Yes, perhaps he should, but just here his planning was interrupted by the sight of food—and Nebond was hungry.

Ruth smiled bravely up at him. "Joseph, dear, why did you take me from my friends? Why, oh why, do you not speak to me, Joseph?" Then she uttered a scream of horror and fell in a dead faint, for even as she spoke Nebond had reached far upward, seized a long wriggling vermin between his fingers and was eating it before her eyes!

Nebond surveyed the still form of the girl without interest. When he

finished his scant repast, he picked her up again none too gently and bolted away toward the canal, instinctively bound for the forest where he had been captured some months previously.

11. Transported

For many days Joseph Kiser had resided in one of the several small hovels which stood in the central isolated portion of Kabo's estate, his mind a maze of agonizing doubt regarding the probable fate of Delam Oblene, and his hope of deliverance at her hands dwindling as day succeeded day and began to number themselves as weeks and yet there came no evidence of the success of her intervention in his behalf.

One morning he awoke with a feeling of intense drowsiness beguiling him to further slumber. A groan, however, from somewhere near caused him to open his eyes listlessly, expecting to see the roof and four walls of his hut but he was surprized into full wakefulness, as a vision of clean blue sky met his gaze. It was not the murky, almost black Martian sky, and his first thought was that all of those harrowing Martian experiences had been but dreams and that he was yet upon the Earth, but one glance at his own hairy, huge-chested body sufficed to quell this suspicion; and then came the groan again.

He looked about him to discern the source of this noise and was elated to find himself lying upon the ground amidst a rather dense growth of shrubbery which waved gently with the motion of the damp, heavy, rather oppressive atmosphere.

Attempting to spring to his feet he was surprized to find that his limbs were numb and sluggish and his body seemed very heavy, as though a great weight were tied about his waist.

He arose with some difficulty. There was that characteristic ringing in his ears which revealed the fact that once again the Strotan Ray had been employed to subdue his consciousness, and the atmosphere seemed almost as though it would strangle or even drown him; his head swam, the scenery spun around, and he clutched for support at a tall bush.

When he had secured a firm hold all his giddiness suddenly left him and he emitted a cry of agony as there shot through the hand with which he held the bush a paroxysm of pain! He quickly released his hold and staggered backward, then recovered his equilibrium and stood for some moments silently regarding his aching palm. The weed which he had clutched appeared innocent enough, being some four feet tall with a stalk about three inches thick at the ground, where it was pink but gradually blended into the husky green color of the branches and foliage, the latter being a five-pronged leaf somewhat resembling the human hand, and as it waved in the gentle breeze it seemed to beckon with mock hospitality.

Again came the groan he had heard before, and turning quickly, he beheld the inert bulk of another huge marb lying in the shrubbery behind him and only about ten paces distant.

Standing there aghast, his mind but barely recovered from the effect of the Strotan Ray with which he had been anesthetized and transported to this spot, he was for the moment bewildered; then he recalled Kabo's threat to mate him with a female marb in order to observe the manner of offspring such a pair would beget. Undoubtedly this threat had been executed and now he was here—wheresoever that might be—in company with a potential mate to abide upon some unfrequented land and propagate a race of beings which would satisfy the Martian's craving for scientific observation!

Kiser stood for some moments gazing in half stupefaction at the inert animal, and as he stood she began to arouse. She raised herself upon one

elbow and looked dazedly about; at sight of Kiser she uttered a growl of fear and made an effort to get upon her feet with the evident intention of retreat, but she lost her footing and slumped helplessly to the ground again.

She lay there gasping and trembling, her protruding eyes dilated with fear, and Kiser thought that she looked remarkably like the one he had seen in Kabo's garden; but that was not strange, as he had seen but one female marb—she might even be the same and perhaps she feared him because he had slain her mate, if indeed she had intelligence enough to know so much.

At any rate she was only a female marb and he was not interested in any further speculation regarding her; so he turned about at once and walked deliberately away.

For some distance he went through shrubbery such as that amongst which he had awakened; then he came suddenly to the border of a dense forest, the trees of which were very large and grew somewhat higher than those in the forest east of Keto. The foliage, too, was not nearly so large, although somewhat larger than any he had seen upon the Earth.

Kiser wondered what remote part of Mars this could be, where the vegetation was so luxuriant and the atmosphere so much less rare, and where as yet there had been no evidence of a canal. The planetary magnetism, too, seemed much greater than at Keto, for even now Kiser was quite exhausted and found it necessary to stop and rest.

There was a distinct line of demarcation between the forest and the area of shrubbery, and Kiser wondered vaguely why that should be so. There was no evidence of there ever having been a forest fire, and yet the forest ended abruptly where the shrubbery began.

Although Kiser knew that this could not be the forest near the city of Keto, yet he felt elated at being free, and should Kabo attempt to return and observe the result of his experiment he would now be in position to offer him a warm reception.

Having rested, Kiser plunged on into the forest, half expecting to come at any moment upon one of the large Martian canals. He had walked perhaps a mile when again the forest ended almost as abruptly as it had done upon the other side, but it did not end at the shore of a canal nor yet another area of shrubbery, but instead there stretched out before him a vast expanse of barren sand-covered surface which glittered almost as white as snow in the sunlight.

The heat had grown oppressive as he neared this barren area, and as he was again much fatigued, he again sat down to rest himself before venturing farther upon his tour of exploration. He had not noticed the heat before and wondered that it should be so much more intense here than in the depth of the forest; yet the fact remained and he found his rest so unrefreshing that he remained longer than previously.

Just as he was upon the point of arising he saw the huge marb whom he had left behind approach the sand ocean at some distance from him. She did not see him and he deferred his advance, intending to allow her to proceed without knowledge of his presence.

She had evidently arrived before him, for she showed no evidence of fatigue as she advanced and strode firmly out upon the sand-covered area apparently quite as intent as himself upon exploration of the land upon which Kabo had marooned them.

For ten—perhaps twenty—paces she advanced without mishap; then she seemed to pause, but thinking better of it again went forward. Just two more steps she took, then stopped dead-still for an instant, turned and attempted to retrace her steps, but

before she could even so much as regain her equilibrium she began to sink in the loose sand about her feet! She attempted to throw herself forward upon her face, but the sand upon which she stood seemed to sway like the waves upon a ropy, viscid fluid with encrusted top. She made repeated attempts to withdraw her feet from the sand but could not do so.

Seeing that she was sinking deeper and deeper and was quite unable to escape, Kiser hastened toward her, but before he had reached the spot another creature appeared from the depths of the forest and, tossing a long rope, dexterously lassoed the sinking marb and was pulling with all his strength in an effort to rescue her when Kiser reached his side.

Kiser caught up the end of the rope and assisted in the towing in, the task being one which taxed the strength of both.

The creature which had come to the rescue of the marb was about six feet tall, walked upright like a human being and his physical build was indeed much more human-like than that of either of the others. His legs and arms were long and muscular and clothed with the well-tanned skin of some animal; his skin was copper-colored and quite bare, with chest and body shaped quite like that of an Earth-man, though the face and head were covered with long red hair which hung down to his shoulders; he had eyes that did not protrude, and a large sneering mouth equipped with strong yellow teeth. One glance sufficed to convince one that he was of some savage human species.

So intent was he upon his duties of rescue that he was not aware of Kiser's presence behind him and when the huge marb had been dragged to the more solid sand nearer the edge of the forest the creature drew a long knife from his belt and with a savage growl sprang toward her.

The marb evaded her rescuer with surprizing agility, but he braced himself for another rush, when Kiser caught his upraised hand from behind and snatched the knife from his fingers.

Taken completely by surprize, the savage creature turned to face this new enemy, but the sight of Kiser brandishing the knife and the other marb approaching him from the side, both much larger than and quite as fierce-looking as himself, discouraged his making a renewed attack, although had he but known it he might easily have vanquished both; and he slunk away into the forest, leaving both knife and rope in the possession of his enemies.

When the beast had gone the marb backed away from Kiser in evident fear and distrust.

"You need not fear me," he said, forgetful that she could not understand his English; "I shall not harm you in the least."

When he had spoken, the marb stopped and gasped in astonishment.

"Joseph Kiser!" she said, as if pronouncing the words with much difficulty.

Now it was Kiser's turn to be astonished. He remembered suddenly that marbs can not speak any of the Earth languages—how did it happen that this one knew his name?

"Yes, I am Joseph Kiser, but how do you happen to know my name? Can you speak English?"

The marb answered him in the Martian tongue, of which he could understand no word. He shook his head and tried to grin, but he must have bared his teeth instead, for the creature stepped back in evident fright.

She soon recovered herself, however, and seemed to be pondering; she essayed to speak several times as if groping for words, speaking each time in the Martian language, although she appeared to be trying to recall another.

After several such attempts at speech this creature bent upon Kiser

a gaze more appealing than savage and said: "Delam Oblene."

"What is that?" he asked, his interest quickening. "Do you have a message for me from Delam Oblene?"

But again the marb was stumped. She appeared to be able to say only those two things which Kiser could understand—pronounce his own name and that of Delam Oblene.

Of a sudden Kiser understood. This was indeed Juak and she was trying to denounce him for having killed her mate. Perhaps her mention of Delam Oblene was to impart that that young lady had informed her regarding the manner of Crobe's death.

SEEING that conversation with this creature was impossible, Kiser turned and strode back into the forest. And when he again became exhausted and stopped, he noted that the air was quite cold. He had noted ofttimes before the very marked difference in temperature between the Martian day and night, but here was a vast difference brought about by only a few moments' walk! Oh well, it was useless to wonder where Kabo had marooned him, for even if he knew, yet he would be none the wiser, since he knew nothing of any part of Mars save Keto—and very little of that. This marked change in temperature, however, puzzled him considerably; how was such a change possible? And why had the innocent-appearing sand proved to be a treacherous mire?

At length his sluggish marb brain reached the correct solution: the sand-covered area was a great lava lake which had cooled somewhat upon the surface and near the margin of the forest, the heat underneath causing the surface to crumble into a sand-like powder, while underneath the surface and farther out there was only molten liquid lava, or some similar substance. This would account for the phenomenon he had witnessed and also for the intense heat at the forest's edge.

The sun had sunk quite low and Kiser began to look about him for some place to spend the night. He found nothing which might suffice for a shelter, and the cold was becoming more and more noticeable; so, after perhaps a half-hour of futile search, he retraced his steps to the margin of the lava lake.

Upon several occasions he had surprized a number of small animals as they fed, which gave him a very valuable clue as to the edible fruits, and, being hungry, he ate freely of a certain variety resembling the apple.

It was quite palatable, and when he had eaten his fill he felt as much refreshed as though he had had beefsteak or eggs.

Darkness came with a startling suddenness—or, more correctly, the sun disappeared quickly and without twilight—for even after the sun had set there was a most brilliant moonlight.

Looking upward to discover the source of this light, Kiser gasped in astonishment, for directly overhead there was an enormous satellite. It was large—much too large to be Phobus; in fact, it seemed many hundreds of times larger than Phobus had appeared upon that memorable night in Kabo's garden!

So! He had been transported to some other planet? Indeed, Kabo had taken no chances whatsoever upon his victim's escaping! Well, since this was most certainly not Mars, what planet was it? Could he be upon Venus? No, for Venus had no such satellite, and, too, he had been led to believe that Venus was shrouded in clouds. The day had been so short that he was sure this was a very small planet; yet what planet it might be he could not guess.

This was the most severe blow of all. Upon Mars he might always have some hope for his ultimate deliverance from the horrible curse which

had been placed upon him, but since Kabo had taken the precaution to maroon him upon some other planet the situation was hopeless indeed.

He had chosen a spot comfortably near the lava lake, where he lay down and tried to sleep, but his mind was so filled with despair that for more than an hour sleep did not come; so he lay staring upward in almost unthinking agony, the enormous satellite hanging mockingly directly above him as if for no other purpose than to remind him of his misery and despair. And directly overhead it remained. The sun had moved rapidly across the horizon and yet this satellite continued to hang directly overhead.

At length the center of the immense satellite appeared to have opened and a broad stairway descended to within a few feet of his outstretched hands but yet quite beyond his reach. He sprang for it with a mighty effort, clutched the lower rung with the tips of his fingers, swayed for a moment, making herculean efforts to hold fast, and then fell.

Kiser awoke with a start to find the sun peeping from the horizon where it had just risen. He glanced quickly upward and—yes, there was still the huge satellite or planet in exactly the same position as when he had first seen it!

Since this planet had not changed its position and remained always directly overhead, then it was clear that the sphere upon which he stood did not rotate upon an axis, but instead it revolved about that other, larger planet with always the same surface toward the planet about which it revolved.

Thus it was that Kiser reasoned he had been marooned upon a satellite of some one of the primary planets; and, since the period of sunshine had been but a few hours, he knew that he must be upon Phobus, the larger and rapid-moving satellite of Mars.

How Kabo had contrived to get him upon Phobus he did not know. Perhaps he had stolen the *Arrogant;* he might easily have done so in case the craft had been left unguarded. At any rate Kiser was here and now he must find food and some manner of abode to protect him from the chill of the heavy, damp atmosphere and from the ferocious beasts which peopled the planet.

He still had the long sharp knife which he had taken from the "Rescue-man," as he had named the creature whom he encountered at the lava lake, but the animal's rope he had left with the marb; he hoped she had had intelligence enough to make use of it.

With this knife he began hewing down such of the smaller forest trees as would best suit his purpose and fashioned them into a rude cabin, stopping the cracks with mud from a small forest stream near by.

To complete this shelter required many of the short days and some of the nights. During this time he had seen nothing further of the marb nor of the Rescue-man. He subsisted upon the forest fruits and such of the small animals as he was able to catch, the stream near his cabin furnished an ample quantity of icy cold water, and withal he was near enough to the lava lake to make artificial heat unnecessary.

KISER finished the roof of his cabin none too soon, for no sooner had he added the last bit of mud and thatch than there began a slow cold precipitation of mist which was to continue for many days. His rude roof held quite well, however, and inside his one-room cabin it was quite cozy, although the rain had prevented his attempting to make even so much as a bed or a chair in the way of household furniture.

Being kept thus indoors was very irksome, for he had nothing to read, and he wondered if he could read if he did have; the marb's brain not

being equipped with a center controlling the ability to recognize printed characters. He could only lie upon the leaf-covered floor and long for the coming of the sunshine.

For three of the short days and as many nights he had been kept inside by the rain. He was lying half asleep upon the floor of his cabin when suddenly there came a knock at his door. Surprized into full wakefulness he sprang to his feet, drew his knife as a precautionary measure, and carefully opened the door. Juak, the female marb, was standing upon his doorstep!

Angered at this brazen effrontery, Kiser was upon the verge of slamming the door shut in her face, but she was gesticulating frantically and speaking with a great deal of emphasis in an effort to impart some seemingly important information, and although he could not understand her words, he could at least attempt an investigation of that part of the forest she was indicating in an effort to learn what it was which distressed her; so he stepped out and closed the door behind him.

Kiser having signaled his readiness to follow, the marb set out in the direction she had indicated as holding something of rare interest, using the greatest caution to avoid detection by some unseen foe by moving with the greatest stealth—peering from behind trees and moving from one tree to another with great caution.

Seeing that she had had the presence of mind to acquire the Rescue-man's rope, which she slung across her shoulder, Kiser respected her attitude of vigilance and did likewise. From tree to tree and from bush to bush they advanced, never more than a few steps apart, until presently the marb halted, assumed an attitude of listening, and put a hand upon Kiser's arm, beckoning him to extreme caution.

For just a moment they waited thus; then Kiser saw one of the Rescue-men emerge from behind a tree trunk and advance to another point of vantage. Soon he saw another and still another; and they were moving stealthily toward his cabin, each carrying an armful of large yellow fruit resembling the tomato!

There were four of them and they were slinking upon his domain presumably to poison him! Kiser's first thought was to let them try in vain, but he feared that they might destroy his cabin, which was none too strongly built; so he impulsively stepped out from his hiding-place and confronted them with drawn knife.

Taken completely by surprize, the four creatures turned in their tracks as one and beat an inglorious retreat, leaving four small heaps of the tomato-like fruit lying upon the ground. Kiser stooped and picked up one of these and examined it critically. There was certainly nothing wrong with its appearance and it looked as though it might taste delicious. Perhaps, after all, the Rescue-men were trying to be friendly and had only intended to secure his good-will by an offering of rare food.

The marb, however, appeared to think otherwise; for when she saw him handling this fruit she uttered a hoarse screech and motioned for him to drop it.

He could see no reason for haste in disposing of the fruit, but when she continued to protest he drew back his long arm and dashed it against a near-by tree.

When he had done this, the marb uttered a cry of alarm and fled, beckoning him to follow. Thinking her fears quite probably due to superstition, however, he did not hasten away, and when he had stood his ground but a moment his eyes closed with a severe paroxysm of pain, while his nose and throat began burning as though a red-hot iron had been thrust into his nostrils.

He staggered, coughing and gasp-

ing, away from the spot, at a loss to account for the extreme pain in his eyes, throat, and lungs. He tried to open his eyes in order to see some avenue of escape, but they were tightly closed by muscle spasm and it was impossible to see at all. However, he soon felt the guiding hand of the marb upon his arm and he walked beside her in an agony of pain, which was not so great but that he pondered upon the magnanimity of this beast who was thus aiding the slayer of her mate—or was it brazen grossness prompting her to actually court the marb who had vanquished her husband?

She guided him to the door of his cabin and assisted him inside, but when, after some moments, he succeeded in opening his eyes she was gone.

She had not been courting his attention then, after all? What manner of marb was this which would go to such length to rescue a stranger—an enemy—and then quietly slink away when the danger no longer threatened? The idea which Kabo and Delam Oblene had given him regarding these animals, as well as his own experience with two of them, was indicative of their viciousness and vileness of temper rather than of any gentleness or amiability. He could not understand any such action upon the part of the mate of the slain Crobe, unless——

Heavens! Could it be possible that Kabo had been so vile as to perform his horrid operation upon someone else—and had he sent some Martian girl here to mate with Kiser after having transplanted her soul into the body of Juak, the marb?

But no; if she were a Martian she could probably speak some Earth language, since all Martians had lived on Earth in a previous incarnation and could remember the incidents of their Earth life. Yet there was the case of his nurse who could speak neither English, French, nor German.

And yet, reflected Kiser, the Martians remembered their previous incarnations by virtue of a certain brain center which served as a special medium of contact between the ego and the conscious mind, enabling them to recall their pre-natal experiences, and if a Martian were given the physical brain of a marb which has no such center, then most certainly such a person could not recall his terrestrial experiences nor could he speak any other language than Martian.

Again, this creature had known and spoken his name as well as that of—of——.

"By God!" Kiser sprang to his feet in great agitation. "That is Delam Oblene!"

12. Abandoned

RUTH HERVY regained consciousness with a start. She gasped with amazement and shock as she was suddenly immersed in icy cold water!

She opened her eyes to find that her abductor had plunged boldly into the canal and was swimming toward the opposite shore with her upon his shoulder. And her remonstration made not the slightest impression upon him. She begged, pleaded, scolded and threatened, but he continued on his way with apparent unconcern until they reached the bank, where he placed her upon her feet while he shook himself and squeezed some of the water from his clothing, then lightly swung her across his shoulder again and entered the forest.

By this time Ruth was trembling from fright as well as cold. She struggled to free herself from this madman by swinging her feet downward, disturbing the equilibrium with which he had balanced her. He overcame this movement with a slight effort and held her more firmly. She continued her struggles with renewed energy and at length succeeded in freeing one of her arms from his embrace; then with a frenzy of fear and

anger she slapped his face with all her strength.

Angered at this evidence of insubordination, Nebond quickly stood the girl upon her feet and faced her with bared teeth and an animal-like growl, and then as she recoiled from him in horror and dismay, he seized her by the throat and shook her until she again lost consciousness!

When again she opened her eyes it was at the sound of voices. Strange voices they were and in the Martian tongue. That language being strictly phonetic and very simple and easy to speak, she had learned to understand it quite well, although she spoke it very poorly.

Nebond placed her upon her feet again, but she was too weak to stand. She staggered weakly and fell to a sitting posture, staring with renewed horror at the sight before her.

More than a dozen ferocious-looking marbs stood surveying the pair with their pointed ears extended forward and their eyes telescoping back and forth in an attitude of hostile inquiry.

"You should remember me!" roared her abductor. "I am Nebond. I lived among you for years! One day Kabo had me captured and carried away; now I have come back. I have came back to stay. I do not fear Kabo! Do you hear me? Harken: Nebond does not fear Kabo! Let Kabo come and try again to capture me and I shall rend him limb from limb! Nebond is very strong, stronger than the strongest among you; even stronger than you, Pleck, and I have come back to the forest to rule as your king! If Pleck resists my ascension to supremacy Nebond will kill Pleck. Pleck must now abdicate, for Nebond is going to be your king!"

There was a hoarse growl from the largest among the marbs and he stepped forward fearlessly. "You are both a liar and a fool!" he screeched. "You are not Nebond and you are not stronger than I; neither are you going to cause me to abdicate in your favor! You are some strange creature of absurd appearance whom we never saw before; you are not one of us! Go away or I shall kill you even as I have killed Klegg and Beon and Huff and Kibe and Jamon and Ruel and Himbo and Jutt and Herb and Parlo! Go away before I run amuck!"

"Yes, many of these I remember," replied Nebond; "some you may have killed since my departure. And you have failed to mention Lamo. Lamo was my father and though I hated him and was glad when you killed him, it placed a stigma upon my family name which I am going to wipe out this day by killing you. I shall not only kill you but all your mates and your children as well!"

"Beware! Pleck is about to run amuck; and when Pleck runs amuck Pleck never maims nor cripples—Pleck always kills!"

"Nebond does not fear your amuck! This day Pleck shall die!"

Ruth was astonished at hearing the creature who she thought was Joseph Kiser speaking in the Martian tongue, without hesitancy or brogue, just as though he had never spoken any other language. At first she had surmised that Kiser must have lived among these marbs and learned the language from them, but now it seemed that he was both unknown and unwelcome here. His reference to Kabo escaped her quite because the name sounded so much like those of the marbs mentioned that she surmised the reference was applied to a marb, and no thought of the scientist entered her mind.

Pleck was beginning to foam at the mouth. "I shall now show you who is going to be king of the marbs!" he roared and bounded forward, his huge form a great mass of fury and hatred.

Nebond nimbly side-stepped this attack and sprang forward in an attempt to obtain a hold upon the

other's throat. He missed, however, and as his shoulder came in contact with the body of the huge marb the beast closed his strong teeth upon his shoulder, having missed his throat by the narrowest margin.

Again and again Nebond tried to obtain a hold upon his antagonist's throat and as many times he was foiled in the attempt. He evaded the brute's efforts to sever his jugular vein by his superior strength alone, and he was fast becoming exhausted by his strenuous efforts in this atmosphere which did not contain enough oxygen to supply his needs on account of his very limited lung capacity, while his antagonist seemed as fresh and sturdy as at their first moment of encounter.

Nebond was beginning to realize that his present physique was not built for fighting as the marbs fight; his mouth was too small and his neck too short to use his teeth to advantage, and too, the other marb had an added advantage in his greater reach and ability as well as his huge chest and consequent greater lung capacity.

Nebond's head began to grow dizzy —not from any injury Pleck had been able to inflict but from lack of oxygen. His breath came in quick frothy gasps and his knees sagged. At length Pleck secured a hold upon his throat and the scenery spun round, his vision blurred, his lungs ached and had Pleck released his hold just then Nebond would have begged for mercy; but Pleck did not desist: his hold tightened and all went black for Nebond.

Ruth watched this battle spellbound. Why did Kiser not use his fists? Why did he not grasp the animal's arm as he had done upon that previous occasion and wrench it joint from joint with his superior strength? She saw him fight a losing fight because he was attempting to use the same fighting tactics as the marb and was unable to do so. She saw that his wind was going fast and at length she saw him limp and inert in the grasp of the murderous brute.

With this sight something seemed to snap in her mind and with the heritage of several generations of fighting Hervys predominating she sprang to her feet and assailed the huge beast with her fists, striking blows straight from the shoulders as her father had taught her; for he had often admonished her that "every woman should be able to defend herself in case it might become necessary to do so."

That Pleck thought but little of the prowess of this new adversary was evident. He did not release his hold upon Nebond's throat but he was prevented from ripping open his jugular, as he attempted to ward off Ruth's blows.

Recalling the fight Kiser had had with the marb on the day of their landing, she suddenly caught the huge beast's arm in both hands and twisted with all her strength. With a howl of pain Pleck released Nebond and turned with renewed energy upon the girl.

Pleck was astounded and his rage was redoubled, but regardless of how fiercely he fought, those blows which she drove against his comparatively fragile facial structures inflicted such punishment as he had never endured before, and time after time he was forced to desist in his efforts to reach her throat. And, too, the arm which she had twisted was all but useless and consequently he fought under an added disadvantage.

NEBOND was beginning to regain consciousness now, and as he rose to his feet a shower of derisive sarcasm was cast at him from the other marbs congregated about but who had offered no interference with the combatants.

"See! See!" they shouted. "The strong man is beginning to revive! The very strong man who would be

king of the marbs! The strong man who lets his mate do his fighting! The strong man who is not half so strong as his *she!*"

Nebond stood gasping, glaring first at the taunting throng and then at the combat between Ruth and Pleck. If he was astonished at seeing the weak creature whom he had so easily fetched into the forest thus besting the mighty king of the marbs he did not comment upon his surprize.

Ruth's composure was going fast. She was gasping for breath now and her vision was beginning to blur. She made another attempt to twist her adversary's arm and failed.

All things considered, Pleck probably desired least to have his arm wrenched as she had wrenched the other one; he stepped back, waving her to truce.

"I dislike to fight with females," he said. "Your man has recovered himself, I see, and I prefer to combat with him. You stand aside and see to it that you do not interfere again! If you do I shall have the entire tribe upon you; if you do not they will not interfere."

Nebond had recovered his wind to an extent and now he rushed upon Pleck, and using the tactics he had seen Ruth use, he grabbed the long slender neck of the marb between his two hands and pushed with all his strength in opposite directions. The animal's vertebræ snapped and he fell to the ground dead almost instantly. Nebond had learned to use his great strength effectively!

He then turned upon the others and with great gusto proceeded to run amuck. The three marbs nearest him were struck down with his mighty fists, another was maimed for life by having his arm twisted until it was broken and badly crushed, and Nebond with the Earth-developed muscles of Joseph Kiser stood among the other marbs loudly proclaiming himself their king and demanding that Pleck's mates and offspring be pointed out to him.

This was very readily done, for the marbs had felt his prowess and they had no wish to antagonize him. The three wives and four young which comprised Pleck's family were ruthlessly murdered while Ruth looked on in horror, protesting as best she could, speaking brokenly in the Martian tongue, pleading with Nebond to stop his wholesale and useless carnage. But Nebond paid not the slightest attention to her pleas. He kept on until he had finished his gruesome task and then his amuck left him quite suddenly and he was calm. But eight marbs had died at his hands and as many others were injured.

"Now I want Pike. Go and fetch Pike to me!" commanded Nebond to one of the marbs who stood trembling near by. This animal hastened to do his bidding and soon returned accompanied by another marb, a female and somewhat smaller than himself.

"Pike," said Nebond, "I have come back to you. I am Nebond returned from captivity to be the king of the marbs; I have just killed Pleck and all his shes and all his offspring; I am the king now and you shall be my favorite queen."

"You are not Nebond!" retorted the female marb. "You are not even a marb; you are that terrible creature who came from the sky in an iron craft and who so cruelly attacked Beck many small moons ago. You are a devil and the marbs do not want you for their king. Go away with the *she* you have with you and let the marbs alone!"

"Do not dare to say to me that I am not Nebond! If you say that again I shall kill you! I am Nebond and you are Pike, my mate, even as you were my mate before I was captured by the Masovadans. Come to me!" He held out his hand toward her, and not daring to refuse, she came and stood in his embrace.

"But Nebond was a marb," she

protested. "Nebond would not dare return from captivity to the forest even if he might; therefore shortly after Nebond was captured I mated with Beck. I love Beck and I do not wish to leave him, not even if the real Nebond should return."

"I tell you I am Nebond and I told you not to say I am not!" He caught the poor creature by the neck and twisted until she screeched with pain, to the delight of the onlookers, save for Ruth, who watched with a feeling of horror and disgust; but, even yet, she could not associate any such action with the Joseph Kiser she had known, and she felt that this experience must be a horrid and unreal nightmare—surely she would awake presently, for it seemed that she could not endure it much longer.

"Yes, Nebond," Pike was saying, "I will be your queen if you say I must. I dare not run amuck for I know you would kill me. I will be your favorite queen, but what are you going to do with your other she? She is much more like you in appearance—will she not be your favorite?"

"I shall give her to Beck in exchange for you. You are much more beautiful and I do not care to mate with her. I shall forage upon the domains of other tribes to obtain my other mates, but always you shall be my favorite queen."

The weird climax of this story provides a fascinating feast of reading for the concluding chapters in next month's WEIRD TALES.

DREAM STRIFE

By BILLY CROSBY

Still-born upon the dewy morning air,
A vision stretched before me: fairyland
It seemed to be, for lakes and trees and sand
Were not of earthly hue; so strangely fair
The tufted towers girt with jewels rare,
The curving spires whereon the gnome-guards stand
To give swift warning for the fays to band
And march in dread array; oh man, beware!

The faint sun dimmed; forth from a black-capped cloud
Twelve monsters sprang to keep their savage tryst:
Then rose the roar of conflict fierce and loud,
Of elfin shouting and of beasts that hissed;
The heavens blazoned forth a flaming shroud—
And all dissolved into the morning mist.